

ORIENTALIST FEMINISM AND THE POLITICS OF CRITICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN  
ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN WOMEN

ORIENTALIST FEMINISM AND THE POLITICS OF CRITICAL DIALOGUE  
BETWEEN ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN WOMEN

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## **Abstract**

In this dissertation I examine the contemporary breakdown of critical feminist dialogues so ubiquitous in the 1990s between Israeli and Palestinian women. Building on interviews with Palestinian women that identify a “top-down approach” in dialogues with Israeli anti-occupation feminist activists, this dissertation examines the role of “power inequities,” Orientalism, and “white feminist authority” (Lâm) in forming the discursive environment for even the most critical feminist dialogues. Conducting various discursive analyses of dialogues between Israeli and Palestinian women, I argue that the mainstream exclusivist Israeli feminist movement as well as “critical,” self-titled anti-racist and “anti-occupation” Israeli feminists continue to function with “white feminist authority.” Palestinian women are often pressured to speak through narrow points of entry that prioritize the paradigms of Western feminism and academic theory, namely, anti-nationalism and unitary womanhood/motherhood. These assumptions constitute a feminist paternalism that is similar to Israeli hegemonic discourses that rationalize “exceptional” but necessary violence against the Palestinians. Palestinian women have initiated a comprehensive boycott of status quo dialogues in an effort to create *more* dialogue. In this way the “silences” of status quo “humaniz[ing]” feminist dialogues (Lorde) which operate through requests for “colonial mimicry” are troubled by the boycott and may ultimately produce future anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist dialogues. The shortcomings of contemporary Western feminism’s role in the Israeli-Palestinian “peace process” are brought to light in this dissertation while potentials for solidarity-activism across “power inequities” are simultaneously mapped out.

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Orientalist Feminism and the Politics of Critical Dialogue between Israeli and  
Palestinian Women

**Introduction**

During a trip to Israel and Palestine in the summer of 2007, Gila Svirsky (a prominent Israeli Jewish feminist anti-occupation activist) proclaimed her surprise that I, a Palestinian woman, had traveled to West Jerusalem to meet with her. I was just as befuddled by her surprise because of my preconceptions about the reality of Israeli women’s relationships with Palestinian women in the region. Back in Canada, I had perused the internet for evidence of feminist solidarity work between Israeli and Palestinian women and finding it seemed rather easy. I perused the websites of *Women in Black*, the *Coalition of Women for Peace* and *Bat Shalom* which, at the time, exhibited images of Palestinian and Israeli women protesting together and holding up posters on which “End the Occupation” is written in Hebrew, English and Arabic.



Figure One: Banner which composed the header on the *Coalition of Women for Peace* (CWP) Website prior to 2007:

[http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/organizations/bat\\_shalom](http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/organizations/bat_shalom)<sup>1</sup>



Figure Two: Current Logo on CWP Website (2011):

<http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/?lang=en>



Figure Three: Current Image on Front Page of CWP Website

<http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/?lang=en>

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<sup>1</sup> This URL became unavailable in 2011. Today, however, there is a Facebook page called *Coalition of Women for Peace* which posts very similar, if not identical, images (See <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Coalition-of-Women-for-Peace/94205446262>). On the other hand, the *Women in Black* Facebook page currently only features Jewish and Hebrew representation of its feminist activities. This is a change from the images featured on the old *Women in Black* website (leading up to 2007) but that website, too, is no longer live online.



Figure Four: Current Image from CWP Facebook Page:

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Coalition-of-Women-for-Peace/94205446262>

Moreover, these websites contained “joint statements,” declarations and what appeared to be jointly written press releases. Such joint declarations could be found all over the internet through various international feminist websites such as AWID.

There was plenty of information about *The Jerusalem Link* which was one of the first official Israeli and Palestinian feminist projects to emerge out of the first *intifada*. It acts as the central connection between the Palestinian *Jerusalem Center for Women* and the Israeli-Jewish *Bat Shalom*. The *Link* is featured on the *Bat Shalom* website with accompanying sets of principles and declarations, appearing to be a thriving “coordinating body of two independent women’s centers.” Consequently, from my musings in Canada, I was excited to be traveling to a “hub” of transnational feminist organizing in Jerusalem. In fact my research question was particularly curious about the principles upon which such solidarity is possible.

Gila Svirsky informed me that very few Palestinian women were still willing to meet with her or other Israeli feminists, despite the fact that she was an active member of the anti-occupation feminist group *Women in Black* (WIB) and a major organizer of weekly vigils which have been held in Jerusalem every Friday for the last twenty years to protest Israeli occupation policies and the ill-treatment of Palestinians. Svirsky further divulged that Palestinian women were no longer coming to WIB meetings (as they had done during the first *intifada* in the late 1980s and early 1990s). As I perused Svirsky's home (the walls of which were adorned with maps of the West Bank detailing the checkpoint system and where activist paraphernalia such as a hat that read, "End the Occupation" in Arabic and Hebrew lay strewn casually) I wondered about this reality.<sup>2</sup> Upon visiting *B'Tselem*<sup>3</sup> a few days later I was told that the Israeli founders were actively and unsuccessfully seeking to hire a Palestinian. Svirsky, who was touring me around the office at the time, explained that Palestinians rarely worked there, despite the fact that many had worked there in the past. At the time, in 2007, a newly hired young Palestinian woman (and a citizen of Israel) had just begun working there. She was considered to be an anomalous exception. Svirsky noted that the Israeli feminist movement was confused by Palestinian women's

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<sup>2</sup> Janet Powers experienced the same sense of shock and discovery when she examined the *Jerusalem Link*. She argues it "appears to be a robust partnership between Israeli and Palestinian women" yet it "was hanging by a thread in 2002" (8).

<sup>3</sup> *B'Tselem* is an Israeli human rights organization in West Jerusalem that documents and exposes human rights violations by Israelis and Palestinians. See: <http://www.btselem.org/>.

recent absence and yearned for more involvement from Palestinian women. But she also intimated some understanding of the separation while describing her frustrations with the conservative tendencies of the “white” Israeli feminist movement. She wondered if that was part of the problem. I logged these questions in my mind, hoping to learn more from Palestinian women, and went about interviewing Svirsky about her queer and feminist anti-occupation politics.

To my consternation, after I blogged about interviewing Gila Svirsky, I received a vilifying public comment on my blog from a fellow participant in a Palestinian human rights student organization in Canada for “violating the boycott against Israel.”<sup>4</sup> I was asked to resign.<sup>5</sup> While this was not my first encounter with the boycott I had only previously considered business or spending-based boycotts. This was the first time I considered the boycott in relation to academic research, dialogue and feminist solidarities. More complexly, I was considering a boycott of dialogue with women who I imagined to be connected with me

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<sup>4</sup> The boycott of Israel is often associated with the *Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel* (PACBI), a campaign proposed by Palestinian academics and intellectuals in 2002 and then officially launched in Ramallah in 2004. PACBI calls for a complete and “comprehensive economic, cultural and academic boycott of Israel” (“About the Campaign”). This campaign advises Palestinian civilians, cultural workers, activists, women workers, feminists and intellectuals (as well as the international community) to comprehensively disconnect from Israeli institutions and businesses. Followers of this campaign, including the Palestinian diaspora and non-Palestinian academics and activists around the world have taken this call seriously and have been successful in enacting boycotts all over the world including in Japan, the UK, and Canada.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that these were the actions of two individuals leading the organization and not all of the members. Others in the organization disagreed with this request.

philosophically because they were active in protesting the occupation whilst also protesting violence against women in general—through more typically-imagined feminist issues such as domestic violence. While I knew that Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues and activities were innumerable during the first *intifada*, I began to wonder about the dynamics of feminist organizing “across borders” today. Indeed, after an overall reconnoiter in the West Bank and West Jerusalem in 2007 and then a visit again in 2009, it became clear to me that the website photos were no longer representative of feminist organizing in Israel and Palestine and that the “joint” vigils no longer existed (except in rare instances of “emergency protests”). My new research question emerged: Why was there such an aversion (brought to my attention by Palestinians living in the diaspora) to my interview with a publicly known anti-occupation Israeli activist?<sup>6</sup> Was there a similar aversion on-the-ground by Palestinian women living in the West Bank and Gaza, or even Palestinian women living in Israel? And more generally, why had critical, anti-racist, feminist and/or activist Israeli and Palestinian women stopped dialoguing when they had done so with such fervor in the early 1990s?

After conducting interviews with Palestinian women, as well as detailed discursive analyses of actual dialogues between Israeli and Palestinian women, I argue that the Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues which were born out of the

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<sup>6</sup> I do not intend to explore diaspora politics as they pertain to dialogue-boycotts because this would open a whole host of other issues that would warrant another dissertation. I am pointing briefly to the ways the diaspora—informed by Palestinian women’s withdrawal from joint activities—raised my awareness of Palestinian women’s politics in Palestine.



stirrings of the first intifada in the 1990s have operated according to the logics of an Orientalist discursive environment. While such dynamics are clear in high-level politics (between Israeli Prime Ministers and leaders of the Palestinian Authority, for example), I argue that an Orientalist discursive environment which largely overwrites Palestinians' historical narratives as well as political theorizations has characterized and continues to characterize dialogue work between the mainstream (exclusivist, "white") Israeli feminist movement and the Palestinian feminist, anti-racist critical activist movement.<sup>7</sup> This Orientalist discursive environment is so pervasive it has even affected "fringe" or self-described anti-racist dialogues between critical feminists. Colonial logics about the racialized *other* as a student of civilization have, albeit in seemingly subtle ways, characterized Palestinian women's roles in dialogues with Israeli women. Palestinian women subsequently seek "humanization" within a cyclically

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<sup>7</sup> Lavie argues that while non-Ashkenazi Israelis constitute the majority of Israel's population Ashkenazi Israeli Jews dominate Israeli feminist organizations and repress the involvement of *othered* Jews and Israelis. For a more general discussion of the racial hierarchies in Israel's society see: Ella Shohat's "Reflections of an Arab Jew," which shows the ways Arab Jews face systemic discrimination in Israel and often repress their markers of ethnicity (i.e. dying their hair blonde) so as not to be mistaken for Palestinians; Elise Young's *Keepers of the History: Women and the Israeli Palestinian Conflict* which shows how "Jews from Middle Eastern countries often try to disassociate from Arabs in public" and "try to make themselves equal to the Ashkenazi, not because they hate Arabs, but to achieve a measure of safety" (59); Nahla Abdo's *Women in Israel: Race, Gender and Citizenship*; and Svirsky's "At Home" which points to the ways that the heavily Ashkenazi Israeli peace (and women's) movement (up until 2002, according to Svirsky) was not adequately addressing "burning issues in Israeli society" with regards to class and race hierarchies within the social justice movement, even if the Ashkenazi movement was working on anti-occupation politics.

dehumanizing discursive environment. Following Audre Lorde's work on difference politics and Homi K. Bhabha's work on "colonial mimicry" I explore growing suspicions about the function of dialogue in the region and its congruence with the ongoing colonial process. I argue that the request made of the colonized person to engage in dialogue for the purposes of attaining peace can be a violent request for "colonial mimicry" at best. At worst, the status quo dialogues can have the effect of entrenching the occupation and may operate as a complementary component of the colonial project. The latter suspicion is growing amongst Palestinians, including the leaders of the Palestinian boycott movement. I conclude by arguing that Palestinian women's creations of *more and different forms of dialogue* (which incorporate Palestinian herstories and the broader colonial context) while boycotting status quo dialogues comprise the "struggle" (Ahmed *Strange*) to come towards an anti-colonial feminist politics that has the potential to re-shape the contemporary stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian peace politics. The boycott and the ensuing "struggle" may contribute to the creation of a critical transnational feminist community but in the wake of its failure, it may have the effect of changing Israeli-Palestinian peace politics on a macro-level.

In 1995 Simona Sharoni wrote that:

Alliances between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are fragile and face constant challenges, originating both from the dynamic and unpredictable political context and from the grave disparities in power and privilege between Israelis and Palestinians—occupiers and the occupied (149).

Sixteen years later, Gila Svirsky and other Israeli feminists remain perplexed about the non-participation of Palestinian women in Israeli women's anti-occupation work. It is my hope that Palestinian women's experiences in dialogues, documented in this dissertation, as well as, the close readings I conduct of problematic dialogues, begin to reveal the "details" of the discursive logics at the core of status quo critical Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogues.<sup>8</sup>

### **Outline of Thesis**

To provide a contextualized background (an imperative that has been pushed by various feminist theorists calling for localized and contextualized studies in feminism and gender relations), as well as in an effort to address the historical lack of thorough documentation of the herstories of Palestinian women ("Table"), I begin this dissertation by briefly outlining in Chapter One the material borders (e.g. the topographical, geographical and political realities) in the region and then outlining Palestinian women's interview responses. I have organized the Palestinian interviewees' comments under four sentiments arising from their own words: "the top-down approach," "Israeli women fall down on

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<sup>8</sup> I will predominantly focus on dialogues and feminist initiatives between Israeli women living in Israel and Palestinian women living in the West Bank. However, I do also include one dialogue between a Palestinian woman from Israel "proper" or 1948-Israel (Nahla Abdo) and an Israeli woman (Ronit Lentin) who live outside of Israel and Palestine. I have only brief references to contributions made by Palestinian women living in Gaza as I was unable to travel there to collect interviews.

feminist principles,” “Israeli women activists are too few and ineffective” and “the whole pyramid is put upside down.” The top-down approach indicates a kind of paternalism (a policy or practice of restricting the “freedoms and responsibilities of subordinates” for “what is considered to be in their best interests”).<sup>9</sup> It also indicates that the dialogues are Orientalist in that they operate according to a colonial discourse in which “a mythologized East, or ‘Orient,’” (O’Brien 218) is understood to be a recognized *other*, as well as an imitation-West (Said 66, 132), that is *necessarily* dominated by the West. In chapters two and three, through the discursive analyses of dialogues, I show how paternalism and Orientalism manifest into “white feminist authority” or the “top-down approach” through the ways Israeli participants guide the dialogue’s structure, parameters and contents.

The latter three sentiments from Palestinian women (i.e. “Israeli women fall down on feminist principles,” “Israeli women activists are too few and ineffective,” and “the whole pyramid is put upside down”) combine to indicate a sense of frustration and suspicion with the functions and effectiveness of dialogue in the region. While acknowledging that there are a small number of anti-colonial Israeli feminists who work diligently against occupation politics despite risks and harm to themselves, there is an overwhelming sentiment amongst Palestinian women that these women are simply “ineffective” because of the ways the larger

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<sup>9</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2000.

Israeli feminist movement operates, in inconsistent ways which do not adequately trouble the power relationship between the occupier and the occupied (i.e. they “fall down on feminist principles” and the “whole pyramid is upside down”). These latter two sentiments indicate discordance between Palestinian women’s conceptions of “feminist principles” and power-politics and Israeli women’s conceptions and practices. The interviews do not offer answers to these questions; rather they form the basis of the questions explored in this dissertation.

In Chapter Two “Orientalist Feminism and White Authority in *To Die in Jerusalem*,” and Chapter Three, “Stubborn Legacies of Orientalism in Left Feminist Academia: Analyzing Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin’s Self-Declared Critical Anti-Racist Academic Feminist Dialogue,” I conduct close readings of two very different genres of dialogue. The first dialogue is featured in a film made for a wide audience called *To Die in Jerusalem* and the second dialogue, between Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin, is academic-activist and serves as the Introduction to *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation*. Although the purposes of the dialogues in each case are markedly different, I have found that the top-down approach manifests itself to varying extents in both. The Palestinian women in these dialogues are asked to narrate their politics through narrow points of discursive entry. In *To Die* Um Samir (the Palestinian woman) is pressed to speak through a narrow definition of womanhood, motherhood, and a temporal boundary around a present-time event. In “Introduction” Abdo is repeatedly pushed to speak through

a narrow Western theoretical model (particularly pertaining to Benedict Anderson's critique of nationalism). These requests are imposed and emphasized through the material, political and discursive authority with which "white feminist authority" (Lâm) operates and become the central focus of the dialogues such that conversations about power relations and the context of colonialism are often only briefly mentioned, if at all. Ultimately, the experiences of the Palestinian participants in these two dialogues are similar to those related by research participants who argued that "the whole pyramid is upside down" as the conversations, which can take many forms, morph into ones in which they are trying to prove their enlightened-ness (in the case of Abdo, that she is "really" a feminist) and their "humanity" (in Um Samir's case, that she is a "good" mother, so that her house is not demolished). It is through these primary texts that I manifest the ways in which constellations of power work to restrain the dialogue's structure, parameters and contents and effectually retains the authoritative role of the Israeli participant.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lentin might take issue with being labeled "Israeli" as she has lived and worked outside of Israel for many years. Abdo, too, has lived outside of Palestine for many years but considers herself Palestinian and lives there on and off throughout her research years. However, as I clarify in chapter three, these two women continue to occupy identities of "Israeli" and "Palestinian" in the ways that their identities shape their access to their childhood, teenage and adult homes as well as their access to family. As such the dialogue they engage is inexorably implicated in the coordinates of power between occupier and occupied, albeit in slightly different ways than ones in which the participants are living *full-time* in Palestine and Israel with no other forms of citizenship, particularly as it relates to the ongoing displacement of Arabs in the region.

In Chapter Four, “The Broader Effects of Orientalist Discursive Environments on the Daily Lives of Israeli and Palestinian Women and Feminist Solidarities,” I link these two dialogues and other indirect Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues (such as Israeli and Palestinian feminist webposts and communicative press releases) with the broad Orientalist discursive environment and its associated material and media power. More specifically, I explore the ways in which the broader discursive environment is influenced by and influences the mainstream Israeli feminist movement involved in dialogue, including the organizations which are widely perceived to be “radical” or “left.” Outlining struggles over historical narratives and the ways some stories materialize power and reality over others, I focus on the recent events of the 2009 attacks on Gaza known as “Cast Lead” to demonstrate how the Israeli narrative of “exceptional” (Agamben) violence and its focus on present-time “events” speaks over Palestinian women’s narratives (in both mainstream media and feminist or activist dialogues) of ongoing occupation and displacement.

This case study ultimately investigates Palestinian women’s reports that Israeli women and feminists “fall down on feminist principles” (often interrupting solidarity during times of “exception” or “the event” and therefore aligning themselves with mainstream non-feminist or nationalist Israeli narratives). The narrative of exception relies on a colonial discourse of paternalistic violence (a necessary violence to tame the “uncivilized”). Therefore, when hegemonic Israeli discourse and hegemonic Israeli feminist discourse parallel each other—even

though during Israeli-titled “normal” or everyday life they seem to diverge—Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues, ultimately, work to entrench colonial relationships between Israelis and Palestinians. In this case, the divergence between mainstream Israeli narratives and Israeli feminist-activist narratives during everyday life can actually operate to characterize Israel as a democratic state that allows or even encourages the existence of radical feminist (perhaps, even pro-Palestinian) politics and is therefore characterized as a non-oppressive state. Moreover, the existence of Israeli women’s critical organizations (and Israeli-Palestinian feminist dialogues) creates a kind of illusion that critical dialogues and solidarities are steadily culminating towards the end of occupation. However, as Israeli feminist organizations, by and large, align themselves with narratives of the “exception” during times of intensified violence, Palestinian women have begun to wonder, and I argue in the affirmative, whether the functions of Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues actually entrench colonial practices (particularly by obscuring the ways in which contemporarily Israeli society works as “one hand”—in the words of a Palestinian feminist activist from Hebron—in complicity with the occupation and colonialism). Such suspicions have produced creative forms of Palestinian resistance to dialogue.

In Chapter Five, “Palestinian Women Break the Silences in Dialogue,” I explore the ways Palestinian women’s contemporary boycotts of dialogue have been erroneously described as “silence” or as “anti-peace.” I complicate the equation of silence with anti-peace by arguing, through Lorde’s work, that silence



can be a pervasive component of dialogue. Lorde explores the operations of silence in hegemonic “white” feminist movements in the 1980s in the United States of America. Furthermore, I explore the ways that dialogue can actually operate as “colonial mimicry” (Bhabha) which is imbued with all kinds of oppressive silences (and discursive impositions) even in “critical” dialogues. As the preceding chapters outlined the details of these silences and discursive impositions, I ultimately argue that Palestinian women’s boycotts of dialogue are actually producing *more dialogue*. Through the boycott Palestinian women re-fashion their “roles” in power relations such that they disturb the colonizer-colonized dialectic in which one bargains for their humanity (through discursive pressures) and the other stands in a position to assess its authenticity and grant it to the former. I conclude the dissertation by opening up important questions about whether the current moment of struggle between Israeli and Palestinian women, and the emergence of isolated anti-colonial dialogues, enforced by Palestinian women, might result in a crucial re-definition of dialogue (its structures and goals) as well as the roles *different* women take up in dialogues. As a larger goal, I hope to contribute, if only slightly, to the potential emergence of anti-colonial feminist *movements* in Israel and Palestine.

## Methodology

To collect information for this dissertation I interviewed activist and academic women as well as farmers, stay-at-home mothers, doctors, and other women from cities and institutions located in the Northern, central and Southern regions of the West Bank (including Tul Karem, Aseera, Nablus, Bir Zeit University, Ramallah, Hebron, and Jerusalem). I conducted two research trips to Palestine and Israel in 2007 and 2009. Public figures who were interviewed include Islah Jad, the Director of the *Women's Studies Institute* at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank and co-author of feminist boycott literature for the *Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel* (PACBI) campaign<sup>11</sup>; Ghada Sughayar, founder (but no longer a member) of the aforementioned prominent Israeli-Palestinian women's initiative *The Jerusalem Link*, former member of the *Marcaz al-Quds la l-Nissah*/the Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW), and current executive director of *Aman/Transparency Palestine*, an organization devoted to

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<sup>11</sup> Jad obtained her PhD from SOAS (School of African and Asian Studies) – University of London – and currently lectures on gender and politics in the Cultural Studies Department (at the Institute of Women's Studies) at Bir Zeit University. Jad is an active community member in Palestine and has carried out many voluntary social roles including teaching in Al-Dimirdash refugee camp. She is one of the founders of the Women's Affair Centre in Gaza and Nablus (1989), "*Les Amies du Francis*" (1990), "Child Corner" project in el-Bireh (1991) and WATC (pan-national Women's Coalition of the Women's Affair Committee). She was also a member of WUS Program's steering committee and worked at building Palestinian women's capacities in research skills and gender awareness. She previously carried out Gender Consultancy for the UNDP and is a co-author for the Arab Human Development Report.

documenting corruption within the Palestinian Authority;<sup>12</sup> and Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, one of the founders of the International Women's Commission for a Sustainable Peace (IWC) in Palestine and currently the director of the *Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling* (WCLAC) in Ramallah. Attaining interviews with such devoted feminist-activists, who had all been deeply involved in initiating and partaking in Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogues and activism for years, was crucially important to my research question. I conducted a general search of all the women's organizations, NGOs and academic departments in the West Bank and sent a letter of invitation for interviews via email. I also sent invitations to well-known political figures such as Hanan Ashrawi (who canceled our interview at the last minute because of scheduling conflicts). Those who responded and were available during the time I was in Palestine were included in my research.

I also interviewed less widely known women, and women who wished to remain anonymous, working in organizations like the *Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling* (WCLAC) in various cities of the West Bank, and the *General Union of Palestinian Women*. There were about eight of these women and they were recruited in the same way as the public figures. Many more non-activist women were interviewed from all over the West Bank and Jerusalem (including Nablus and Aseera). I also interviewed women activists who were not

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<sup>12</sup> Sughayar calls herself a secular socialist (having written a Master's thesis on socialist farming in Palestine) and notes that she has survived sexually violent interrogations by the Israeli State for her feminist work with the *Jerusalem Link*.

affiliated with a particular organization, such as stay-at-home mothers who would welcome delegations of students or activists from other countries and conduct educational sessions about the occupation of Palestine. The recruitment process for these women was sometimes informal and spontaneous and interviews were gathered all over the West Bank and East Jerusalem including Tul Karem, Nablus, Aseera, Ramallah and Hebron.

I had originally planned to interview a few Israeli women (who were participating in contemporary “joint” dialogues). However, the lack of such initiatives at the time as well as the retaliation I received after interviewing Svirsky from the Palestinian community meant that my research interests and questions changed. Subsequently, I turned to interviewing Palestinian women about their decisions to boycott such initiatives and studying the conditions for these separations. As such I interviewed only one Israeli woman, Gila Svirsky, who is one of the most prominent leaders of Israeli feminist activism in Israel, before changing my research direction.

Some interviews remained formal, sticking to the pre-written questions and conducted in professional offices; others were informal and operated like conversations or stories over cups of tea. It is difficult to enumerate the interviews I conducted because every conversation I had with a Palestinian functioned as an informal interview: they would ask why I was there and about my research question and then they would offer their experiences and opinions. I took all of

these conversations and interviews into account when formulating my argument and in gaining a sense of the on-the-ground “structure of feeling” (Williams).<sup>13</sup>

This process produced a holistic study conducted through semi-structured interviews that varied from one participant to another in order to produce a multi-dimensional and vast understanding of Palestinian women’s various perspectives. This said, Palestinian women are not a homogenous group. They are isolated in their own contexts whether those include camps, villages or cities, and furthermore differences in class, education and sometimes religion shape their political views. I do include interviews with women from a broad range of religious beliefs (including Muslim and Christian) as well as women who live(d) in refugee camps, smaller cities or villages and in the urban centers. Moreover, on-the-ground observations of major events like the International Women’s Day March in 2009, political conferences, art shows, film festivals and cultural events in the West Bank and Jerusalem supplement the contents of the interviews I acquired to further my sense of on-the-ground politics in Palestine. Finally I was able to collect texts published by local Palestinian presses and authored by

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<sup>13</sup> William’s structure of feeling refers to “the culture of a period” or the “particular living result of all the elements in the general organization” (53). While feminist writings have critiqued William’s work for ignoring subordinate cultures (O’Brien 302) and Williams goes on to explain a complicated set of relations that compose this structure of feeling, I am using this term here to indicate the notion of a deep and widespread “social character” or “cultural pattern” (Williams 53). The era of peace dialogues of the late twentieth century had its own structure of feeling while the new era of boycott movements encompass a shift in a structure of feeling even if the dialectic between Israelis and Palestinians continues to shape social relations and cultural ideologies around resistance, sovereignty, and identity.

Palestinian women including local academic journal issues and political posters, which informed my understandings of local gendered experiences, activisms and political theorizations. The sum of this survey during my visits to Palestine and Israel has helped to formulate and anchor my research question which I took care to ensure was relevant locally as well as internationally.

My theoretical and investigative methodology relies heavily on the critical analysis of language and visual culture. I analyze the set up of dialogues and the para-text of film while also investigating the myths and ideologies that inform the language and logic expressed in the dialogue (i.e. through *signs of Otherness* which include words, gestures, and body language). I draw on discourse theory through elucidations on the discourse of Orientalism through the work of Edward Said and Orientalist feminism through Charlotte Weber's work (with brief gestures to the work of Stuart Hall on concepts of discursive regimes). I also draw on feminist theorizations of "white feminist authority" through the work of Maivân Clech Lâm, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Nawal El Saadawi and Audre Lorde who trace lineages of colonialist or racist feminisms and their accompanying discourse and ideologies.

As I elaborate on "power inequities," and eventually "resistance," I employ Michel Foucault's work on power relations, particularly in relation to postmodernism through the work of Ihab Hassan and Joan Wallach Scott. I also further reflect on the dynamics of colonial relationships through the work of Homi

K. Bhabha, and the role of peace discourse within a system of global inequalities through the work of Jan Selby. In doing so, I conduct a critical analysis of some feminist literature which too easily equates “peace” with womanhood (including the work of Elisabeth Porter and Robin Morgan) by drawing on the work of Simona Sharoni and Katherine Viner. Finally, I explore the feminist theorizations of Susan Stanford Friedman and Sara Ahmed who try to articulate new and critical forms of international feminism (oscillating between the concept of a singular feminist politics and a pluralized one) in an effort to reconcile the critiques of the aforementioned Orientalist or racist feminist discourses with a feminist politics that continues to be mobilizing. The above-mentioned theorists form the primary core of my investigative process.

Methodologically, I do not limit my analysis to academic work but also to a variety of political writings (i.e. newspaper articles, political movement websites, media reports and non-academic meditations on Israeli-Palestinian issues) to formulate a holistic and accessible argument about Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues and activisms. In some ways it is necessary to have conducted critical analyses of “popular” texts in order to conduct a study of the discursive environment. I also included such texts to avoid focusing my critique only on other academic books and theorizations, which would have risked producing an insular conversation within the academy. Such a conversation would not correspond with the intended widely-political function of my dissertation.

While interviews with Palestinian women range across class, political, economic, social and vocational spectrums, I intentionally focus much of my analysis on the works of Palestinian and Israeli women who self-identify as anti-racist feminists. I interview Palestinian women who criticize state nationalisms (distinguished from popular or cultural nationalism, as we see in Chapter Three), who express an interest in feminism and women's experiences in patriarchal cultures as a politics that goes beyond national borders and affects women internationally (emanating from both local and "foreign" poles) as well as a politics of "internal" critique (of sexual abuse of boys and girls, governmental corruption, incest, rape, "honour" killings and so on). These critiques are articulated in conjunction with or through the critique of colonialism, racist ethnic cleansing and the occupation of Palestinian territories. I am interested in why *these* Palestinian women have decided to stop dialoguing with Israeli self-declared anti-racist feminist activists who have much the same interests in that they also perceive feminism to be an international concern. These Israeli women are critical of "internal" issues like illegal activity and human rights violations by the Israeli state, the occupation of Palestinian territories, the actions of the Israeli Defense/Occupation Forces<sup>14</sup>, as well as the rise in domestic abuse and rape in

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<sup>14</sup> "The Israeli Occupation Forces" (IOF) has been used more recently, instead of "Israeli Defense Forces" (IDF) to indicate the dissonance between the narratives of "defense" and the narratives of intentional and systemic colonial expansion and occupation (see Powers 45). Moreover the IOF includes the private security personnel that are now visible on the ground and facilitating the occupation. The IOF term indicates that the IDF is not simply there to retain the status quo and



Israeli society, increasing pressures to take on the nationalist cause of procreation, and the glass ceilings for Israeli women in the military etc. (although, it is more difficult to pinpoint Israeli activism that combines these activisms as fluidly as Palestinian women who for example work in the WCLAC<sup>15</sup>). Such boycotts of dialogue are not easily explained by the extreme nationalisms or inter-ethnic and inter-cultural “hatred” so often touted by those who see the Israeli-Palestinian situation as a case of intercultural intolerance.<sup>16</sup>

### **Academic Contribution**

Thus far, in-depth feminist studies on Israeli and Palestinian women’s dialogues do not exist. Feminist studies interested in contemporary international or transnational solidarities between Israeli and Palestinian women have tended to focus on listing the alliances which are forged (the organizations’ names etc.) and describing the general everyday impacts of the “conflict” on Israeli and

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keep the peace but to actually help settlers settle, and create “facts on the ground.” From here on I will refer to them as the IDF/IOF.

<sup>15</sup> For a feminist text which seamlessly combines theorizations of “internal” feminist issues with colonialism and occupation through story-telling see *If I Were Given the Choice...’: Palestinian Women’s Stories of Daily Life during the Years 2000 to 2003 of the Second Intifada* (2007) published by the WCLAC in Jerusalem.

<sup>16</sup> Some also consider it a case of interfaith hatred, assuming all Palestinians are Muslim. Actually, some of the Palestinians most affected by the occupation are Christian (such as the Palestinians living in Bethlehem who are being encircled by Israel’s wall).

Palestinian women's lives while gesturing, only briefly, to the outcomes of such alliances, often by stressing that the alliances between the two groups of women are fragile because of "unequal" power relations.<sup>17</sup> A variety of these publications are devoted to "humanizing" the two sides to each other.<sup>18</sup> All include short interviews with various Israeli and Palestinian women ranging in political stances and vocation, but all, exhibit a dialogue that is between the authors and the interviewees. These texts are not documents of Israeli-Palestinian dialogues as the non-Israeli and non-Palestinian mediator-observer occupies the central starring role in these texts to whom the former parties divulge their stories.

There are also academic books that include Palestinian and Israeli-authored articles on the political issues in Israel and Palestine such as *Shared Histories: A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue* (2005), which is edited by two Israelis and a Palestinian. This book does include live dialogues which are fascinating but focus primarily on re-writing and comparing historical narratives (primarily leading up to 1948). The book does not refer to the bases or political principles upon which the dialogue takes place and reflections on the act of dialogue (or the conditions for it) are minimal. The dialogues are also largely between men.

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<sup>17</sup> See Young's *Keepers of the History: Women and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (1992) and Peteet's *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (1991) for examples of this work.

<sup>18</sup> Examples include Cathy Sultan's *Israeli and Palestinian Voices: A Dialogue with Both Sides* (2006), Janet M. Powers' *Blossoms on the Olive Tree: Israeli and Palestinian Women Working for Peace* (2006) and Penny Rossenwasser's *Voices from a 'Promised Land': Palestinian and Israeli Peace Activists Speak their Hearts, Conversations with Penny Rossenwasser* (1992).

Another text, Rabah Halabi's *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue: The School for Peace Approach* (2000) includes bits of dialogue and its main focus is on the role of facilitation in an "asymmetrical environment." They argue that the presence of both a Jewish and Arab facilitator in a dialogue is necessary and can produce a healthy environment for dialogue. However, the book often assumes that the anti-colonial politics of the Jewish facilitator they have chosen from the School for Peace is simply a facilitator, without mentioning the discursive regimes he or she must work to trouble. As such the Jewish participants often come to odds with the Jewish facilitator. Moreover, "unequal power relations" are mentioned briefly without nuanced (and perhaps this is the job of Cultural Studies) analyses of the discursive regimes which need to be troubled in order to work against "unequal power relations" on a larger scale. This troubling is assumed without being named and so this book risks speaking to a very narrow audience.

Comprehensive attempts to deconstruct and analyze case studies of Palestinian-Israeli dialogues exist in Psychology (such as Halabi's aforementioned text). Often a variety of communication theories such as Social Identity Theory (SIT) are applied to these case studies. SIT examines the effectiveness of group versus one-on-one dialogues and the dynamics that occur in group settings between Israelis and Palestinians in comparison to conversations between individuals (see Suleiman). These studies have very specific questions about communication strategies within the dialogue without making explicit

connections to the discursive environment which undergirds the dialogue (again, perhaps this is a Cultural Studies quest). For example, they mention the ways that unequal power relations obstruct the success of dialogue but do not adequately describe what comprises those power relations. Still, they offer some important insights that gesture towards problems in dialogue. For example, Suleiman argues that these dialogues very often take the form of “interpersonal” dialogues instead of “political dialogues” and that such a focus “forces a symmetrical structure onto the encounter” (45). As a result, “the relations of dominance between the majority and minority are ignored” (45). These are important observations especially because the existence of relations of “dominance” or “unequal power relations” is still sometimes contested by those who see Israelis and Palestinians as groups that are warring or “in conflict” as opposed to constituent groups of a colonialist system. However, there is a lack of both interdisciplinary writing on the matter and Cultural Studies critical analyses on the ways these dialogue dynamics relate to the larger discursive environment which rationalizes them. Indeed, Suleiman argues that:

Despite the importance of power and status difference in determining individual and group responses in situations of intergroup contact, these variables have not earned the attention they deserve in the research on encounter groups or in the broader research on intergroup relations (41).

Moreover, and more specifically, when it comes to the particular dynamics of women-only structured dialogues there is only one text which comes close to analyzing these “variables.” “The Politics of Alliances between Palestinian and

Israeli Women” by Israeli-Jewish academic Simona Sharoni (currently living in the United States). Sharoni’s text outlines the trajectory (up until 1995) of Israeli-Palestinian women’s relations and the failures and dissipations of Israeli-Palestinian solidarity work. She attributes the dissolution of “joint” work to three primary phenomena: the macro-political events that compose the background of solidarity initiatives and can interrupt solidarity efforts (such as the Oslo Accords or the Gulf War); the divergent expectations that the participants have in dialogue (some hoping for political transformations while others seeking to develop personal relationships); as well as the oversimplified foregrounding of women’s commonalities as the basis for dialogue (in experiences of motherhood, for example). Sharoni, in the end, argues that until there is an “unequivocal acknowledgement of power disparities between the two communities and willingness on the part of Israeli-Jewish women to account for their power and privilege,” future alliances will continue to be fragile (149). When referencing the “unequal nature of relations between the two groups,” Sharoni describes the disparities in their quality-of-life and in mobility (142); however unequal power relations could be connected to the discursive impositions (of simplified womanhood) she describes or the ways mainstream Israeli narratives about war and times of “exception” seep into the Israeli feminist movement more thoroughly. Unequal power relations are often understood to be material or visual without being linked to the discursive, at least when it comes to understanding dialogue. Of course there is important work on the role of discourse in the

occupation of Palestine by such prominent scholars as Edward Said and David Theo Goldberg, but, while they are interested in the dialogical nature of identification between Israelis and Palestinians, they do not reflect on dialogue, especially not the logic and discourse of women-centred dialogues. With Sharoni's important work in mind, there continues to be a need for an in-depth look at the discursive nature of these dialogues, combining discourse theory with race theory to answer questions about how unequal power relations manifest themselves in the structure and content of dialogue. This is particularly important as theories of postmodernism, Foucauldian power relations and dialogism have been sometimes (although misguidedly) conjured up to challenge the conclusion of "unequal" power relations between Israeli and Palestinian women (I will return to this topic in the next section).

When Sharoni was writing in 1995, Palestinian women were engaging in dialogues because they were hopeful about them but also because they wished to avoid being labeled "radicals" or "fanatics" and "few women on either side of the Israeli-Palestinian divide [had] publicly criticized dialogue groups" (141). As Sharoni elaborates:

Since the rationale of dialogue groups appears both reasonable and constructive, those who raise questions about differences in power and privilege amongst the participants or criticize the liberal assumptions that underlie this mode of encounter, are often portrayed as rejecting the very idea of conflict resolution. (141)

Today, the context is dramatically different. After years of ongoing dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, Palestinian women have begun critiquing the

premises of these dialogues and initiated the boycott of dialogue *as a feminist peace politics*. It is for this reason that dialogue and the discursive regimes within which it operates warrants a thorough investigation. Fifteen years after Sharoni wrote her article, operations of feminism have changed: the mobilization of dialogue has taken new forms and the world (including academia) is grappling with global debates about boycotting Israel.<sup>19</sup> Today's public boycotts of dialogue, particularly between self-titled critical and feminist women, warrant a rigorous academic and activist re-investigation of the ways feminism is being practiced on the ground. How have ideologies around "dialogue" and feminism cross-pollinated and what are the reasons for a feminist boycott of dialogue? This dissertation hopes to contribute exactly this kind of rigorous activist-oriented academic reinvestigation.

### **Anti-Colonial and Anti-Racist Feminism in a Postmodern Academic Scene**

I have noted the lack of Cultural Studies texts on Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogues. There is also an emerging need for work on "power" and "feminism." New texts continue to emerge theorizing anti-racist and anti-colonial feminism (see Razack et al's, "Introduction") along with texts which continue to

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<sup>19</sup> These debates have reached virtually every end of the earth and have affected all kinds of institutions (financial, educational, artistic, feminist, workers', unions and so on). University presidents, international feminist networks, artists, and union workers are navigating the notion of boycott with particular notions of academic freedom, worker's solidarities, and artistic cooperation.

grapple with the difficulties of articulating a global or transnational feminist movement while simultaneously acknowledging power differences between women (see Ahmed's *Strange*). These texts explore notions of power and "dominance" at the same time that postmodernist theory proliferates meanings of power. The following discussion situates this dissertation within these important conversations particularly in relation to academic and activist conversations about the development of anti-colonial feminism.

As aforementioned, many theorists and activists, when speaking about Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogues, defer to the terminology of "unequal power relations" or the "*unequal* nature of relations between the two groups" (Sharoni 142) to explain the disappearance of joint dialogues. Some, more generally, refer to unequal power relations to explain the failures of formal and ongoing dialogues. During my graduate education, I recall a conversation in the graduate lounge about power inequities between Israelis and Palestinians during which someone retorted: "Come on! After Foucault we know there's no such thing as unequal power relations!" This challenge is an ungenerous simplification of Foucault's work. Nevertheless, such challenges are not entirely uncommon in North American academic conversations and served to briefly paralyze me from speaking "intelligently" about asymmetries in power particularly in relation to the feminist writings which were unanimously asserting that dialogues are premised upon "unequal power relations." Challenges—like the imperative from the fellow graduate student—which attempt to diffuse power in such a way, inspire this



dissertation's examination of the meaning and *intricate details* of “unequal power relations” in Israel and Palestine and, more specifically, in regional women's dialogues. This thesis takes as its foundation a notion of power that comes from “everywhere” while simultaneously operating as a “major” domination in static political moments (Foucault 94). It is important to acknowledge the usefulness of Foucauldian models of dynamic power relations and consider that power emerges from many variant social forces and subjectivities. However, it is equally necessary to understand the nuanced operations of “dominations” (94) and oppressions within this model of “force relations” (94).

Foucault explains that power is not “a general system of domination exerted by one group over another” and it is not “a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state” (92). Nor is it “a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule” (92). Rather, Foucault argues, power must be understood “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” and “as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them [...]” (92). Thus power, according to Foucault, is

the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (93)

Power can therefore be understood as a “grid of intelligibility of the social order” which must not be seen as a “central point” from which “secondary and descendant forms would emanate” (93). As such power is “the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power” which are always “local and unstable” (93). Ultimately, Foucault describes power as coming “from everywhere” (93) but simultaneously as operating through and reproducing “inequality” (93). Indeed, Foucault himself deploys the term domination when he points out that “major dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by the confrontations” within a system of power (94). Similarly, Joan Wallach Scott describes power as a set of relationships, processes or stories “that produce positive effects” while simultaneously composing a system “of repression or domination” (Scott, “History” 680). There have also emerged feminist writings about the “the centrality of domination to Foucault's thesis on power” (Munro 79) particularly in relation to feminist theory.

Therefore, it becomes possible to talk about an “overall” or systemic domination that withstands (or is fed by) various countercultural and subversive challenges. Articulating narratives of overall domination, however, is difficult in a postmodern academic environment where the destabilization of “Truth” and “grand narrative” is important. Foucauldian notions of power that focus on his dispersal of power relations, combined with a reading of postmodernism's invalidation of a “mode of unification,” including a “narrative of emancipation”

(Lyotard 37), can have the effect of paralyzing theorizations of systemic domination and oppression as well as narratives of liberation, as we can see in the graduate student's dismissal of the possibility of "unequal power relations."<sup>20</sup>

As the modernist obsession with grounding knowledge in a concept of Truth became replaced by one which stresses the predominance of contingency in our forms of knowledge, grand statements about the "rational criticism" of the Enlightenment project were destabilized along with grand narratives of linear development and claims to moral and universal Truth. Postmodernism came to be characterized by indeterminacy, "a combination of trends that include openness, fragmentation, ambiguity, discontinuity, pluralism, deformation [...]" disappearance" (Hassan) and high levels of skepticism emerged against "the extremes of dogma" (Hassan). Grand or master narratives were shown to be

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<sup>20</sup> My peer's reading of Foucault is not isolated. Munro describes a widespread polarization in feminist academic discourse between Foucauldian power theory and radical feminist theory (such as that of Catherine Mackinnon's) which describes women as universally subordinated by men and patriarchy through the complicity of the state. Munro argues that this polarization of Foucault's "productive" power and MacKinnon's articulations of domination and subordination is problematic (because Foucault's later works point explicitly to a state of domination as a distinct form of power relation) while simultaneously critiquing MacKinnon's essentialisms and deterministic theorizations about women's and men's experiences. Some feminists have argued that Foucault has "failed to accommodate the phenomenon of domination" and that his theory falls short for feminist and other critical purposes (88). Others have tended to focus on and highlight Foucault's work on micro-politics to belittle resistance movements. Understanding productive power politics while articulating possibilities for resistance has become a difficult endeavour to which feminist theorists contribute, often arguing, resistance occurs *within* power.

composed of dominant forms of moral or ethical behavior and critiqued on the grounds that “truth” is the product of historical contingency.

The postmodern diversification of “truths” and voices has worked in an arguably liberatory fashion to destabilize dominating voices and give authority to marginalized ones. Moreover, Foucault’s notion that power comes from everywhere pays attention to the agency of the marginalized person (who is never absolutely without agency) within overall systems of power (where the privileged *need* the marginalized for their self-identification). Such developments brought into the “centre,” to a limited extent, manifestly “othered” stories of the modern period. However, these theoretical turns have sometimes worked as new “master narratives” to delegitimize claims of victimhood and political oppression, deeming them too simplistic. General statements about domination or oppression have, consequently, become tenuous rallying points for academic intervention in socio-political realities.<sup>21</sup> I argue that tensions between academic commitment and political narratives can be inspired by a misreading of Foucault and apathy-inducing readings of postmodernism. For example, postmodernism and Foucauldian power politics can still produce, in academic culture, “a new orthodoxy” or “a master discourse” (Creed 364), disguised as counter-cultural or sub-cultural discourse. Feminists in postmodernity have found themselves in a

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<sup>21</sup> There are various feminist texts which outline “tensions” around power, resistance and domination in Foucault’s work (see *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism* (1993) by Caroline Ramazanoglu, and *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (1988) by Irene Diamond).

paradox which debunks patriarchal discourse as “fiction” and as master narrative, but then requires that they position their beliefs in the universal oppression of women as “closer to the truth” (Creed 364). While it is important to reveal that all “stories” are historically and ideologically contingent constructs (and that they are all components of “power”), it is equally important to show how some are linked to material power, allowing them to produce socio-political-economic realities and essentially *effect power*, while others have less access to material forms of power (military technologies etc.).<sup>22</sup> The latter’s stories have very *real* (corporeal and material effects) on the authors of other stories. Nawal El Saadawi, an Arab feminist activist argues that “the power of knowledge alone is not enough in a world where military power can intervene at any moment to protect the economic interests of neocolonialists” (167).

As there emerges an increasing disparity between those who can effect stories with material power and those who are corporeally disempowered by dominant stories, it cannot be the final conclusion that *all* stories are equally contingent and therefore equally (in)valid, because the story (in a given moment) that asserts power and creates “truth” is the one that is much more likely to be

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<sup>22</sup> Many argued thus on *Al Jazeera English* and other news media upon the release of “the Palestine Papers” (a set of transcripts of “peace” dialogues between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel ranging from 2001 until today) in January 2011. Academics and politicians specifically refer to the inequities in power when it comes to “writing things down” or holding Israel accountable to conversations in the peace dialogues because Palestinians are not able to enforce agreements. Even the UN cannot effectively hold Israel accountable for illegal activity that violates peace agreements. Reasons for this include *real effects* of material, economic and political power.

fully realized in material forms. While all stories are dialogical in nature and are composed of metaphors and relational meanings, some have the ability to *realize* their versions of stories and produce conditions of poverty and violence, for example, in a much more explicit way than others.<sup>23</sup>

With these conversations about power and postmodernism in mind, this dissertation takes as its theoretical basis the call for “pragmatic postmodernism” (Hassan) as well as the call for anti-colonial feminism. Ihab Hassan argues that because postmodern “facile skepticism” lacks conviction, it is important to ask how one can “recover the creative impulse of postmodernism” while being “inward with reality” (Hassan). Hassan argues that when postmodernism is not deployed pragmatically it remains plagued by two key issues: “the glaring disparities in wealth among and *within* nations, and the furies of nationalism, collective identity, [and] mass feelings.” Similarly, post-postmodern feminist theorists such as Susan Stanford Friedman, who celebrate the ways in which the “pluralization” of stories and feminisms “has contributed profoundly to the expansion and diversification of feminism” and has been “vitaly necessary,” nonetheless maintains an interest in the “development of a multicultural, international, and transnational *feminism*” in the singular (4, emphasis mine).

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, when Israel defended its “Cast Lead” (2008 and 2009 attacks on Gaza) authorities insisted that Israel’s critics are simply Anti-Semites who overlook the rocket attacks launched by Hamas. This narrative then rationalized the attacks on Gaza. Palestinian stories did not have the same political, corporeal and material effects—although their place in the Israeli imaginary and within Israeli discourse is absolutely crucial (see Chapter Four for an elaboration on power and stories during “Cast Lead”).

Friedman claims that in the process of producing postmodern critiques of feminism as a grand narrative, feminists have lost the grounds to be “politically engaged as [...] feminists” (*Mappings* 185): “The question of ‘feminist engagement’” at this contemporary moment “forces us to ask anew where and how we can be politically engaged as academic feminists” (185). The challenge is not only to value postmodernism’s lessons about the historical contingencies of knowledge but also to honour and act on urgent political issues through the unification of movements.

Friedman stresses “the need for a new singularization of feminism that assumes difference without reifying or fetishizing it” (*Mappings* 4). She calls for a “locational” or contextualized feminism that:

travels globally in its thinking, avoiding the imposition of one set of cultural conditions on another, assuming the production of local agencies and conceptualization, and remaining attentive to the way these differences are continually in the process of modification through interactions within a global system of diverse, multidirectional exchanges. (6-7)

Located feminism pays special attention to the:

specificities of time and place, but unlike fundamentalist identity politics, it is not parochially limited to a single feminist formation and takes as its founding principle the multiplicity of heterogeneous feminist movements and the conditions that produce them. (5)

Friedman and Hassan seek to engage a pragmatically postmodern theoretical model through which narratives can be seen as both historically contingent and

*truthful or real.*<sup>24</sup> However, the challenge lies in gauging whether Friedman’s call might replicate some of the universalizing precedents in “white” feminist history. How can this “unity” be imagined differently within an anti-colonial and anti-racist framework?

“Authoritative” and exclusionary white feminisms have a deep-rooted history in Europe and North America and have had impacts on most of the world through their discursive reach (both in language and practice), often facilitated by colonial and anthropological practices. Both in the “Western” domestic scene and in colonial contexts, racialized women and *othered* women complain that dominant forms of feminism often hide differences between women. Self-proclaimed second-wave feminists like Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldua began to critique mainstream feminism domestically in the United States in the 1980s inspiring the seeds for third-wave feminism which promoted the proliferation of differentiated women’s voices.<sup>25</sup> While some privileged “white” feminisms often

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<sup>24</sup> Indeed Judith Butler, often cited as the quintessential postmodern feminist, also argues that “a construction [...] is not the same as an artifice” (*Bodies* 94). Constructivism is not made freely and should not be associated with the freedom of a subject to form his/her own identity; rather, Butler emphasizes how “deep-seated” and *real* a construction is to human life (*Bodies* 94).

<sup>25</sup> Grass-roots feminist activism had understood and protested against the exclusionary practices of mainstream “white” feminism long before academic feminism comprehended it. Racialized, working class and often queer feminists in North America questioned the homogeneous and reductive categories in feminist work “at home” in the United States and in Canada because they claimed their identities were not represented in white middle class (predominantly liberal and neoliberal) feminism. Third-wave feminism attempted to highlight and address these problematics which were largely consequences of inadequate categories and labels. Third-wave feminism, however is considered to have either



insisted on a universal womanhood or universal feminism, racialized women activists, artists and academics began arguing that “white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone” (Lorde, *Sister* 117); as a result, racialized women’s experiences became “too alien” for the women’s movement “to comprehend” (117).<sup>26</sup>

In the international context, critiques of the feminist movement like Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s much-cited essay “Under Western Eyes” (1991) stretched the criticism of universalizing and non-contextualized feminisms by contending that feminist writings “colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite singular ‘third world woman’” (53). Mohanty argues that many feminists analyze “‘sexual difference’ in the form of a cross-culturally

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never achieved these goals or to be ongoing. Anti-colonial and anti-racist feminists today have produced important texts critiquing the limits of third-wave feminism (see Sara Ahmed; Hurdis; Razack et al).

<sup>26</sup> In *Sister Outsider* (1984) Audre Lorde notes the “signal absence of the experience of women of Color as a resource for women’s studies courses” (117): “The literature of women of Color is seldom included in women’s literature courses and almost never in other literature courses, nor in women’s studies as a whole” (117). In *Ain’t I a Woman?: Black women and Feminism* (1999), bell hooks, too, seeks to show the relationship between gender and race by connecting North American histories of black slavery and white privilege with stratifications of privilege within the feminist movement. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa similarly reveals the complexities of women’s lives living along the Texas-Mexico border, dealing with the intersections between cultural, race and material borders in order to complicate feminism’s universalization of womanhood. Racialized women began to critique local dynamics of white privilege and class stratification arguing that women experience the liberal project and the functions of the state differently depending on their class and racialized (non)privileges.

singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male domination” and this leads to a “reductive and homogeneous notion [of the] ‘third world difference’” (53). As such Western feminism was verging on the “ahistorical” (53) to “produce the image of an ‘average third world woman’” (56). As Mohanty explains, according to much Western feminist theory:

[The] average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). (56)

This third world woman is then juxtaposed or rather, cannot exist without an already understood Western woman who is educated, modern and has control over her own body and sexuality (56). Mohanty’s argument resonated within many feminist circles as she argued that Western feminist writings and methods of analysis subscribe to a “homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group” (Mohanty 56). The universalizing impulses of mainstream Western feminisms (which have an international reach) are particularly powerful because they become entrenched through notions of white entitlement, which in turn influence dialogue dynamics between “western” women and “other” women. Class and race politics, then, begin to work in tandem with imposing feminisms to produce a sense of “white feminist authority” (Lâm 873) when women engage each other across difference.

In “Feeling Foreign in Feminism,” Maivân Clech Lâm recounts her experiences of what she calls “white feminist authority” (873). Lâm asks a man

named Dan at a party in New York if she could walk with him to the subway due to fear for her safety and a white woman later makes the same request. They walk together and when they enter the nearly deserted subway station Lâm says to Dan, “I am so glad that you are here with us; you realize how dependent we are on you for our safety” at which point the white woman “lunged” at Lâm and screams “How dare you! You should be ashamed of yourself! Speak for yourself because you are certainly not speaking for me!” Lâm responds “Goddamn it! Your feminism is not mine, OK?” (868). Lâm adds another experience with a “close white friend” with whom she had agreed on political positions in the sixties but had recently diverted on issues of “racial, class, ethnic, and gender analysis” (869). While discussing the democratic candidates in the United States at the time, Lâm’s friend “offered that she felt very good about Bill Clinton.” Lam replied that Clinton had attacked Bush for being too soft on Castro; had faulted him for being lukewarm on Israel, and had upheld the execution of Arkansas prisoners. Lâm explains that these were weighty issues that would normally be taken up by the two of them but they were brushed aside by her friend who “summoning up the fullness and single-mindedness of her feminist subjectivity” delivered a “bottom line”: ‘Look Maivân, Clinton is pro-choice. That overrides everything else, and obligates us to vote for him’” (869). Lâm explains that “barred from constructing [her] own bottom line and forbidden to breach [her friend’s], [she] retreated into silence” (869). For Lâm, issues of “imperialism (Cuba), national liberation (Palestine), and race (blacks are executed at a significantly higher rate than whites

for the same crimes) were at least as important as that of the right to abortion” (874). But Lãm describes the “privilege exercised by white women” in their authoritative declarations of what feminism *is*. She argues that such authority springs from:

their relatively unproblematic access (by comparison to women of color) to authority and resources, which in turn have a way of generating one another. The authority to enunciate rules that was so easily asserted by the white women in my stories percolates into their personal environments from the larger topography of empire, past and present.

Lãm argues that the critique of exploitation is still governed by empire and remains “by and large, attached to white persons, white theories and white languages” (873). Critique, Lãm argues, relies on “fruits of empire” like “archives, museum collections, and other ingredients of knowledge” (873):

It is thus ‘natural,’ in the ongoing context of empire, for the white woman in my subway story to assume that her specific take on feminism is the orthodox one (her society has the resources to back it up); to assume also that she has the right (indeed the *mission civilisatrice* and ‘manifest destiny’) to set me, a perfect stranger, straight on this subject; and to do so in a manner that *marks me as either child or miscreant*, but certainly not political co-worker, let alone sister. (873, emphasis mine)

While Lãm admits that the subway incident may have been simply a story about “two oddballs” with no relevance for feminism, upon recounting this story to countless colleagues and friends she came to realize the ways in which empire “intrudes even into important friendships” (873). In these instances, white feminist authority works to “cut back rather than expand familiarity, which at its

best has to be about mutual knowledge, not prescription” (873).<sup>27</sup> While we cannot take Lâm’s example to stand in as a comprehensive study of “white feminist authority” the imperatives with which “white feminists” can shame racialized women into particularly “narrow” forms of feminism (a common experience) are helpfully depicted here. This authority parallels that which is taken on by the women occupying the structural position of “whiteness” in *To Die* and in the academic dialogues I analyse in Chapters Two and Three.

White feminism has taken new forms “in the context of global capitalism and imperialism” to form a “transnational bourgeoisie” (Razack et al, “Introduction” 14) and thus remains deeply problematic: Whiteness is “a form of subjectivity that is socially constructed, historically contextual and inherently unstable” and its equation (as a social identity) “with the socio-political category of the West has been defined as particularly problematic for its furthering of

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<sup>27</sup> For Lâm the differences lie in the “subject of need along with its nemesis, which is the privileged access to resources” (875): “The subway woman had a need—safety—and went about meeting it in a practical enough way without, however, ever acknowledging the need itself, and indeed while confronting me for naming my own vulnerability” (875). The status of dependence, Lâm argues, is “incompatible with ‘whiteness’.” Moreover, while Lâm’s subway story shows how the white woman desires complete independence from men, other work on “the veiling of women in Jordan” or “rapes in Bosnia,” for example, reveals that “the complex cultural, communal and familial ties” that produce both damaging and liberating effects for women cannot be narrated in the same language of individual freedom. Their advocacies are deeply rooted in community. Lâm herself argues that “Many middle class Vietnamese women like [herself]” in contrast to “white bourgeois women in the United States” exhibit “little hesitancy in depending on men, and in accepting the latter’s dependence on [them] in return” (878).

colonial and imperialist projects” (Razack et al, “Introduction” 10-11). White feminism then is defined as “a feminism that failed to recognize the impact of settler colonialism” and “focused on equality without addressing issues of sovereignty” (Razack et al, “Introduction” 4). Patricia Monture explains that a white feminist analysis in which violence against aboriginal women, for example, “was an issue of what men did to women” remained non-useful and “impossible” (qtd. in Razack et al, “Introduction” 3) because of its refusal to consider the larger colonial context of such violence. Such feminisms have been called liberal, universalizing or simply white. Of course in the current constellation of globalized economies “white” feminism is not always executed by a light-skinned person or even a person of European or North American descent. This is an effect of the ways in which women of colour have at times internalized colonial discourse (Razack et al, “Introduction” 8)<sup>28</sup> as well as an effect of the ways that structural privilege is no longer explicitly tied to skin colour (although whiteness remains privileged in North America and in colonial contexts). The histories of universalizing and equality-focused or liberal feminisms remain institutionalized in various ways. These feminisms have historically, more pertinent to my project, been Orientalist in form.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> So many of the world’s people have been socialized and incorporated into the patriarchal capitalist political economy and education system, and are therefore “subject to western ideologies of gender identities and relations” (Razack et al, “Introduction” 8).

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed description of the histories of Orientalism and the prioritization or universalization of liberal values (gauged by the degree of women’s public

Interestingly, however, anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist scholars (including many Palestinian feminists) remain interested in thinking about a transnational feminism even if propositions vary in their vision. In order to understand what anti-colonial feminism envisions as the potentiality of such a broad movement it is important to define feminism in anti-colonial terms. For anti-racist and anti-colonial feminists feminism is defined as a broad anti-oppressive politics. It has been defined as the belief in “the dignity and potential for upward mobility of every woman,” the erasure of “class lines between women” and working for “choices in their [women’s] lives” (Darraj 301), and as “a social and political commitment to a higher vision for society by resituating women from the margins into the center” (Hurdis 284). It has also been defined more holistically “as the eradication of sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, and heterosexism” (Hurdis 284).

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visibility in the workplace etc.) in international feminist traveling and movements see Charlotte E. Weber’s doctoral dissertation entitled, *Making Common Cause?: Western And Middle Eastern Feminists In The International Women’s Movement, 1911-1948* (esp. pages 25-47). Weber argues that many American and European women in various international women’s movements (particularly later in the twentieth century), “[d]espite their sympathy for and occasional identification with their Middle Eastern sisters [...] never regarded them as equals. The ‘East’ remained, in their view, less modern, less rational, and less civilized than the ‘West.’” (47). Accordingly, European and North American leaders of international women’s movements (in this case the *International Alliance of Women*) “envisioned only one model for feminist movements, and they saw themselves as its natural vanguard, bringing aid and enlightenment to their more ‘oppressed’ sisters” (47). This paternalistic, civilizational and anthropological discourse constitutes the dynamics of “white” or—in the case of Weber’s work and my dissertation—Orientalist feminism which is too often complicit with colonial projects.

The forms antiracist and anti-colonial feminism take are various. “Women of Color feminism” is a term used to identify this kind of holistic critique of oppression (Hurdis 285); womanism has been the label of choice for some time of several black feminists in the United States; and *Ikhwat Muslimat* (Muslim Sisters) has become a movement that both secular Muslim women and Islamic feminists have joined (Darraj 305; Badran 172). Of course there are many others all over the globe. Some of these feminisms, particularly Arab or Muslim feminisms, have articulated desires to be spouses and mothers and reject the focus on individuality as equated with freedom from traditionally feminine roles in mainstream white feminism (Darraj 309). Some of these feminisms have also grappled with the complex issues of nationalism, colonialism, sexuality, racism and class. Many women are articulating the complicatedness of oppression whether that complexity is described as interconstituted (Bannerji) or interlocking modes of oppression (Razack et al, “Introduction” 3) or as intersectionality (Motapanyane; Crenshaw). For these feminists, the effects of oppression and colonialism (with their inherent forms of sexual and racial violence) cannot be understood as “discrete systems of oppression but rather as interlocking ones” (Razack et al, “Introduction” 3). How, then, is a transnational feminist movement envisaged? And why is it desired?

Badran argues that transnational feminism is necessary because “theory travels, including feminist theory; it informs and supports local activist efforts” (172). Sara Ahmed notes that “women already encounter each other across the



globe, in ways that involve differentiation and antagonism” through global signifiers of the “global woman” and through the activities of global institutions such as the United Nations (17). Badran indicates the circularity of local-global processes by arguing that local feminisms applied at local levels “fee[d] back into theory” (Badran 172).<sup>30</sup> She argues that such global collaborations mean that women are “taking lessons from each other” (173). Badran describes the contemporary moment as historically unique because “patriarchal states are having a hard time continuing with impunity to perpetuate misogynist ideas and agendas, although they are doing their best to hold on” (173). While this claim is debatable, it is important to note that Badran sees immense value in the concept of a transnational or international “unitary” feminism that is composed of collaborations with its many parts.

Sara Ahmed similarly proclaims she is arguing against universalism and cultural relativism but sees value in “community.” How is this definition of community to be differentiated from that of universalizing “white” feminism and its complementary function within colonial and imperialist projects? How does Badran’s vision of an international feminism envision the role of “white” or

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<sup>30</sup> She describes the collaborative nature of the work of Islamic feminists with secular Muslim feminists as debates are shared with Muslim women in India and Canada who are resisting Sharia law because of “gender justice” (Badran 172). She also cites the example of Women living under Muslim Law (WLUML) or the Abu Dharr Collective which are composed of “seasoned theorists and activists resident in various parts of the globe” (173).

Orientalist feminisms especially when her work, arguably, speaks back to the very stereotypes which place Arab and Muslim women on the “student” end of the “white” feminist movement? More complexly, how is this definition of community different from Susan Stanford Friedman’s call for “locational feminism” which critiques macro-level concepts of feminism for erasing differences between women but still calls for an international or transnational feminist movement in the singular? How do we think about community while avoiding the risks of appropriation and the imposition of “white feminist authority” (Lâm 873)?

Ahmed, Razack, Smith and Thobani are very explicit in their definitions of anti-colonial feminisms but describe solidarity and “community” in vague ways. Theorizations of “otherness” or stranger-ness bring us closer to imagining what this contemporary solidarity and community looks like: Ahmed argues “collective activism” (178) might be formed “through *the very work that we need to do* in order to get closer to others, without simply repeating the appropriation of ‘them’ [...] as a sign of difference” (180).<sup>31</sup> But how do we “work” against binaristic and violent differentiations? Anti-colonial and anti-racist feminists continue to use the language of “dialogue” and “face to face encounters” (Spivak

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<sup>31</sup> Ahmed makes a distinction between the “other” who is often the white woman in contemporary “equality” politics and “other others” who are racialized in the popular imaginary. She argues that “the dialectic between the self and other is insufficient: it is the very acts and gestures whereby subjects differentiate *between* others (for example, between familiar and strange others) that constitute the permeability of both social and bodily space” (*Strange* 15).

qtd. in Ahmed *Strange* 178) as means towards a collective activism. Spivak argues that:

a collective activism which does not involve face-to-face encounters with others will fail. Such encounters, based on a proximity that does not allow merger, benevolence or knowledge (in other words, that does not overcome distance) involve work: they involve “painstaking labour.” (Spivak qtd. in Ahmed *Strange* 178)

Ahmed claims we need to get “closer to others in order to occupy or inhabit the distance between us” (179) without necessarily meaning a physical closeness, as Spivak does. However, Ahmed privileges the use of “dialogue”: “The differences between us necessitate the dialogue, rather than disallow it—a dialogue must take place, precisely because we don’t speak the same language” (180). In fact it is this dialogue that, for Ahmed, characterizes the foundation of a feminist collectivity. Ahmed explains the “we” of such a “collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than being the foundation of our collective work” (*Strange* 180). For Ahmed a broader feminist movement is the *struggle* (perhaps, dialogue) to get closer to each other and “other others” (180). Within this theorization, an important question arises. What does Ahmed and Spivak’s productive dialogue look like and how do we distinguish between a feminist-community struggle and what El Saadawi calls “colonial dialogue” (149)?<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> El Saadawi describes a case study of “North South” feminist dialogue that constituted “colonial dialogue” (149). An international feminist conference called “The Wellesley Conference” (in the 1970s) required that women from the global South, in El Saadawi’s terms, acquiesce to the parameters of dialogue within the

I argue that understanding the violent discursive regimes which undergird feminist dialogues such as the ones I examine between Palestinian and Israeli feminists is an important step towards this “struggle” so that the work required for people to get “closer” may occur. Ahmed’s insistence that the “we” of such a collective politics is what must be worked for is importantly paired with her insistence on the details of how race, gender and other oppressions work to differentiate some others from other-others in particular socio-political contexts. Indeed, the work of dismantling those discursive regimes might comprise the struggle in itself.

For example, Razack, Smith and Thobani show that, for the indigenous women contributors to their volume, “the revival of indigenous knowledge systems and the rejection of Eurocentric discourses” are “key to their activism and scholarship” (8). Razack, Smith and Thobani further argue that there is a need “for collective activism, embodied encounters, and a willingness to engage in the hard work of dialogue and solidarity” but that this process must include “a politics of engagement and speaking *to* and not simply speaking *about* non-white women and Indigenous women” (Razack et al, “Introduction” 12). The difference is difficult to describe without the risk of prescribing a universal template of dialogue without attention to context, but it is an important distinction to work

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conference and “dissident women need[ed] to be replaced with smiling ones” (149). I include a more in-depth look at the Wellesley conference in Chapter Three when I explore the role of “colonial dialogue” in academia.

from and develop. While this dissertation does not take as its primary goal to develop a model for fair dialogue, it promotes the deconstruction of discursive regimes which appears to constitute the work of this “struggle.”

Such deconstructions will allow us to see the moments of domination which can exist even in ostensible “dialogues.” Within this academic and cultural moment where we understand that the subject is both “the effect of a prior power” and “the *condition of possibility* for a radically conditioned form of agency” (Butler, *The Psychic* 14) we must ask “how can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency?” (Butler, *The Psychic* 10). If we are all part of the make-up of power, how can we also “resist” it? The “*hegemonic effects* that are sustained” by the confrontations within a particular system of power (Foucault 94, emphasis mine) become the focus of resistance and that which needs to be dismantled. Thus, the study of the intricacies in relations of power in feminist work is important if we are to understand the nature of a systemic domination, particularly in a political situation (e.g. the Israeli occupation of Palestine) that composes a rare and occasional moment of “massive binary divisions” (Foucault 96) *within* power. Understanding the nature of the “manifold of relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, and limited groups and institutions” (94) to compose power, with local oppositions and cleavages, is important in debunking static binaries of victim/oppressor while simultaneously creating deeper

understandings of systemic and large-scale oppression and domination. Perhaps it is in this kind of minute and multileveled study that Ahmed's "struggle" to get closer lies.

### **A General Background and Context for Dialogue in Israel and Palestine**

Over the past forty years, a superfluity of formalized dialogues has been organized between Israelis and Palestinians living in Israel and Palestine. Formalized dialogue initiatives began in the 1970s (just after the 1967 war and at the beginning of the illegal Israeli military occupation) when Israeli organizations and the Council for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace began talking about "Palestinians' right to a state of their own" (Golan and Kamal 199).<sup>33</sup> While there are a few instances wherein these formalized dialogues were initiated by local Palestinians, they were predominantly organized or facilitated by Israeli state institutions such as the Ministry of Education or nongovernmental Jewish organizations (Suleiman 34) and foreign actors including European or American based NGOs, feminist movements, and academic centers. Lavie describes a phenomenon called *du-kiyyum* in Hebrew meaning co-existence to help explain "an idiosyncratic genre of Palestinian and Israeli 'get togethers' to process old grievances" (217).

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<sup>33</sup> Israeli organizations initiating dialogue were emerging from all political spectrums including Zionist organizations and "left" organizations like Matzpen and the New Communist Party (Rakah).

While dialogue was viewed with suspicion on both sides in the early 1970s, there were a few Palestinian individuals willing to engage.<sup>34</sup> Shortly after, in 1974, members of the PLO, headed by Yasser Arafat at the time, began meeting with Israelis at the official level. These meetings were often set in Europe and were not unanimously supported by PLO followers (Golan and Kamal 200). By the mid 1980s, “Palestinians and Israelis came to the conclusion that the absence of communication at the official level was detrimental to the future of both peoples” (Golan and Kamal 200) and a number of dialogues proliferated.

While there were many historical precedents for Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues and solidarities before 1948, the beginnings of formalized Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues were initiated by American women and began in Nairobi Kenya in 1985 (at the Third UN Women’s Conference) (Golan and Kamal 201). While some of the dialogues continued when they went home, Golan and Kamal explain that these dialogues were tenuous and dialogue between the women only began thriving once the first *intifada*<sup>35</sup> began in 1987 (201).<sup>36</sup> The first *intifada* brought with it many changes: the revival of the Palestinian women’s movement; a resurgence of Israeli women’s interest in the Palestinian

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<sup>34</sup> Some of those individuals were from Bir Zeit University and were not affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). They were however, eventually supported by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) (Golan and Kamal 199).

<sup>35</sup> The origin of the Arabic word is *intifad* which means to “wake up with a jolt” (Abdo “Nationalism” 148). In English it can be synonymous with “uprising.”

<sup>36</sup> Many of these dialogues were also organized by foreigners like Belgian Jewish leader Simone Susskind (201).

women's movement; ubiquitous opportunities for "joint" projects between Israeli and Palestinian women; as well as a general enthusiasm for finally bringing peace to the region.

### **The Intifada and Palestinian Women's Movements**

The first *intifada*, beginning in 1987, was the culmination of twenty years of frustration and pain resulting from the Palestinian daily struggle under occupation (see Abdo's "Nationalism"). While Palestinian frustrations with Israel's policies had historical precedents, the anguish began to intensify further when—in the 1967 war—Israel illegally occupied portions of Palestinian land beyond the UN-sanctioned 1948 borders. During these 20 or so years, Israel gained control of more Palestinian land, built more settlements and walls within the occupied territories, and generally increased control over all Palestinians from the Suez Canal to the northern tip of the Golan Heights (Pappe 186)

During the first *intifada*, there were large scale protests and demonstrations as well as concerted efforts at education and peaceful resistance. Palestinian women became increasingly visible in public spaces and involved in the national struggle. According to Giacaman and Johnson, Palestinian women's activities formally expanded from the home to the community at large during the first *intifada* (159-167). Palestinian women have long herstories of protesting publicly and organizing outside of the home and have also organized with Jewish



women for at least a century in Palestine (Fleischmann), but many Palestinian and non-Palestinian academics and activists noted a unique kind of energy around the first *intifada* when the majority of women were “mobilized simultaneously in a collective resistance to the Israeli occupation” (see Khoury 4; Powers; Giacaman). Besides being involved in explicitly political work on gender and anti-imperialism projects such as community lectures on patriarchy and marches or demonstrations, Palestinian women also formed coordinated efforts in organizing relief services after army raids, and formed defence and rescue teams which defended their neighbors by deterring army arrests and settlers’ aggressions.

Women also provided emergency medical treatment for the injured, distributed food in areas that were under curfew, visited the wounded in hospitals and the families of prisoners and martyrs, and established educational committees that were responsible for organizing classes to compensate for the schools’ and universities’ closures imposed by Israeli military authorities. (Khoury 28-9)

Palestinian women’s activities became centred on the community at large such that household production cooperatives promoted a “home economy of locally produced food and clothes” to separate the Palestinian economy from the Israeli economy (Khoury 29). While much of the women’s activities mirrored their traditional roles as protectors of children and nurturers in general, their public presence increased (Powers 92). The formalization and upsurge of public networking extended into a coagulation of cross-border connections with Israeli-Jewish women. This new phase of women’s organizing, as we will see throughout this dissertation, was unique.

### **History of Israeli-Palestinian Women's Solidarities and Dialogues**

Intercommunal (trans-ethnic) relations had precedents “long before the current stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (132) as “women’s associations—formal and informal networks, acting autonomously or connected to wider political systems—have historically supported intercommunal relations among Jews, Muslims, and Christians in the Arab world” (Young qtd. in Sharoni 132). However, alliances and encounters between Israeli and Palestinian women became “infrequent following the 1948 war and the establishment of the state of Israel. An exception was the Democratic Women’s Movement (TANDI) founded in 1948 (Sharoni 133). These connections were largely different in nature however from contemporary ones (even while some of their principles were similar).

The consolidation of a Palestinian women’s network of neighborhood and popular committees in the occupied territories facilitated new social and political networks between Palestinian and Israeli women. These connections differed from previous alliances based on “shared positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” or joint workers’ strikes in British mandate Palestine (Sharoni 131-133). While Palestinian women’s organizations have historically been inclined towards the transnational, not only in the form of pan-Arab feminist alliances with other Arab women in countries such as Egypt (Peteet 58) but also with Jewish women’s

unions during the time of British mandate Palestine,<sup>37</sup> *formal* political alliances with Israeli women based on gender were rare. Prior to the uprising, “planned meetings and political alliances between these groups were almost nonexistent” and the few alliances that did exist were not based on gender. According to Sharoni, these alliances were often based on:

personal relationships that evolved in the context of ongoing exchanges between Israeli peace activists who were mostly affiliated with non-Zionist or anti-Zionist groups and Palestinians affiliated with factions of the PLO that had a progressive socialist platform—namely the DFLP [the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine], PFLP [the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine], and the communist party. (131)

However, during the first *intifada* Palestinian women’s relations with Israeli women grew in quantity and changed in nature. Indeed, Israeli and Palestinian women were connecting in new ways in the first *intifada*, with an interest in understanding the occupation of Palestinian territory as intrinsic to the oppression of women on all sides and with an investment in collaborative work (including dialogue and the issuance of joint statements).

At the start of the *intifada*, Israeli and Palestinian activists in *Shani-Women against the Occupation* organized in Jerusalem. With over 250 members,

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<sup>37</sup> As early as 1921, alliances formed between Arab and Jewish women workers employed as factory workers in Palestine (Sharoni 132) and this paralleled the predominantly male establishment of the League for Arab-Jewish Friendship in 1921. These alliances between Israeli and Palestinian women continued throughout mandate Palestine and into the creation of Israel in 1948 (Young, *Keepers* 55). For a detailed history of early Palestinian women’s movements and linkages with the Jewish communities in mandate Palestine, see Ellen Fleischmann’s *The Nation and its ‘New’ Women: The Palestinian Women’s Movement 1920-1948*.

Shani organized study groups, lectures from women living in Israel and in the occupied territories, solidarity visits to hospitals and nurseries, demonstrations, protests against the detention of Palestinian political prisoners and, with Palestinian educators, the closure of schools in the West Bank (Young, *Keepers* 55). In 1988 Women in Black held their first vigil in Jerusalem in demonstration against the occupation (Young, *Keepers* 56). Palestinian women and men often used to join them, but, of the Palestinians that did, most lived in Israel or Jerusalem. In 1989, an important conference entitled, “A Call for Peace—A Feminist Response” (Young, *Keepers* 57) coincided with the creation of two women’s NGOs: *Markaz al-Quds lal Nissaa*<sup>2</sup>/The Jerusalem Centre for Women (JCW) to represent the Palestinian territories and *Bat Shalom* in West Jerusalem to represent Israeli women’s voices. A coordinating body—the Jerusalem Link—was also created as an umbrella organization under which the JCW and Bat Shalom would dialogue and cooperate in joint political activity. In the same year, 1989, at the end of the conference “Women Go for Peace,” six thousand Israeli, Palestinian, European and American women “marched from West Jerusalem to East Jerusalem” calling on the Israeli government to “recognize and negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)” and to agree to an international peace conference as well as the “establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel” (Lerman 1517).

Additionally, in May of 1990 at the Brussels Conference entitled “Give Peace a Chance—Women Speak Out,” Palestinian and Israeli women issued a

joint statement. While there were many disagreements about the language of partition plans and debates about nationalist identities, the joint document was celebrated as “an achievement” in and of itself (Galilee qtd. in Young, *Keepers* 54). Hanan Ashrawi noted that the debates were “a matter of semantics, not a matter of essence” (Galilee qtd. in Young, *Keepers* 54).<sup>38</sup> By 1991, Israeli and Palestinian women were getting involved with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and seeking larger audiences through this international women’s network. It is not easy to give a fully comprehensive outline of women’s activities in the late 1980s and early 1990s as different books offer competing timelines and there is a lack of clear chronologies or fact sheets about these activities. Yet it is clear that there was an explosion of dialogues between women and that Israeli and Palestinian women were engaging in unprecedented dialogues and transnational activities based on gender alliances.

These new activities were premised upon connecting notions of “peace” and “womanhood,” as is evidenced by the titles of the conferences. Feminist alliances during the first *intifada* were characterized by an overall investment and faith in dialogue as a vehicle to peace, with a particular emphasis on women’s propensity for “good” dialogue based on their shared experiences. Many dialogue groups were set up between Israeli and Palestinian women (in tandem with the growth of other dialogue groups like bereavement-grief parents’ circles and youth groups intended to create future generations of “friends” as well as peace and

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<sup>38</sup> Ashrawi’s contemporary position on dialogue for peace is markedly different.

understanding). Prior to the first *intifada*, there were Israeli-Palestinian organizations and dialogue groups in Israel “proper”<sup>39</sup> such as “The Bridge,” formed in 1975 (Aharoni). However, face-to-face interactions between women from the West Bank-Gaza regions and Jewish-Israeli women were becoming more and more common, feminist-inspired (in a liberal sense of the term, focusing on the woman as individual), and formalized in nature.

This organizing between women met with some resistance. At the beginning of the first *intifada*, forty Israeli women trying to enter refugee camps in the West Bank were stopped by the Israeli army. The women argued that they wanted to “see the situation for [them]selves and express solidarity with Palestinian women” (Ostrowitz qtd. in Young, *Keepers* 54). Israeli women viewed the denial of permission to enter the West Bank as a form of censorship which they identified as a “feminist issue” (Young *Keepers* 54). Despite these obstacles, Israeli and Palestinian women worked to connect with each other and innumerable joint dialogues and activist projects ensued, including the formation of the *Coalition of Women for a Just Peace* composed of various women’s groups in the region.<sup>40</sup> In 1999 Golan and Kamal (scholars local to the region and

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<sup>39</sup> By Israel proper I mean Israel’s borders according to the 1948 borders sanctioned by the UN.

<sup>40</sup> Resistance to “joint” solidarity in general had had historical precedents as well. While it was “not uncommon for Jewish women, who emigrated to Palestine in the early 1900s, to connect their struggles for equal rights and equal pay to those of Arab workers,” the Zionist leadership “thwarted all attempts at solidarity between Arab and Jewish workers” (Elise Young qtd. in Sharoni 133), although

involved in dialogue groups) wrote that Israeli and Palestinian societies participated in dialogue groups “proliferating beyond capacity to number them” (197). This dissertation explores the nature of these new connections and why they have disappeared today.

### **A Note on Dialogue**

The *Oxford English Dictionary*<sup>41</sup> defines dialogue as “a conversation carried on between two or more persons” and as “discussion or diplomatic contact between the representatives of two nations, groups, or the like” and finally as “valuable or constructive discussion or communication.” The relatively new definition of dialogue as a political negotiation or “diplomatic contact” was solidified in a unique way in the Middle East into what has been called the “peace process” (Selby 25). I will elaborate on the politics of the “peace process” in the following section. When it comes to the definition of dialogue as “constructive discussion or communication” there are innumerable propositions in various disciplines (like Psychology, Social Science and Political Science) trying to define it, seeking to advocate particular forms of dialogue as particularly helpful. Some theorists dealing specifically with the Palestine-Israel conflict promote the importance of a mediator in dialogue while others, who follow contact theory or

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this was not particular to women’s dialogue groups as they existed in the 1990s because they did not exist.

<sup>41</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2000

the information model for example, argue that simple contact between conflicting groups can constitute productive dialogue (Suleiman 33). A debate has ensued between various psychologists and social scientists about whether dialogue is simply a conversation between two people (i.e. contact or sharing information) or whether dialogue needs to be characterized by a particular form of communication in order to be called “constructive” or dialogue at all.

If it is the latter, what does constructive dialogue mean? Following Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on dialogue Shoshana Steinberg argues that the ideal “dialogic moment” reflects a “deep and meaningful way of communication including expression of emotions, recognizing and relating to the other’s feelings, listening without judging that leads to cognitive and affective understanding of the other” (Steinberg 485). This moment is:

a kind of empathy to the other that seems to exemplify concepts such as a moment of cognitive and affective understanding, of ‘real meeting’ as defined by Buber (1965a) and Rogers (1959), of participating in the other’s experience without losing the self’ (Steinberg 475).

The “dialogic moment” has also been described as a moment “in which a new understanding of the other is reached (Holquist, 1990; Levinas, 1969), and a change in perception of the other and self is achieved (Buber, 1967; Rogers, 1959)” (Steinberg 487).

The dialogues which have thus far occurred between Israeli and Palestinian feminists have not sufficiently changed the “perception of the other” and old (colonial) understandings of the other continue to entrench themselves. Despite over two decades of peace talks barriers and separations have become



more intense than ever. There are many exchanges during which Israeli and Palestinian women have developed a kind of empathy for one another's personal lives but, as we see later in this dissertation, such moments of empathy have not materialized into a change in perception of the Palestinian "other" and therefore have not created strong solidarities between the two groups of women during times of "war" or "exception." The perceptual changes have not been dramatic enough to adequately interrupt the racial logic of colonial occupation.

Steinberg notes the difficulty of attaining effective dialogic moments in Israel and Palestine because they occur in isolation from the reality that is still ongoing outside. She explains that researchers found "undesired outcomes of empathy" (487). When participants "learn about the suffering caused by discrimination, they may experience an empathic reaction of identification with the other's pain, together with feelings of guilt, shame, and anger toward the inter-group," and thus "[m]ixed feelings can evoke a feeling of confusion and discomfort that can lead to a defensive reaction in the form of denial and avoidance" (Steinberg 487). The disconnect between the events "still ongoing outside the group" and the moments of empathy inside the dialogue groups appears to indicate that dialogic moments are "not [...] the desired goal" (487).

The conditions and contexts for dialogue are therefore just as important for defining dialogue as is the act of dialogue. Indeed it has become necessary to define dialogue through a combination of the literal act and the conditions which produce it. For example, political scientist, Micheal Rabinder James describes

ideal “critical intercultural dialogue” as occurring when “participants [...] adopt an attitude of openness towards each other's cultural perspectives [...] understand each other's perspectives; and [...] *communicate under conditions which they mutually can accept as fair*” (James 590, my emphasis). Therefore the conditions for dialogue have become part of the definition of dialogue. In investigating the conditions for dialogue it is important to explore that which constitutes “a larger dialogue (the speech communication of a certain sphere)” (Bakhtin 117), regimes of truth (Hall 135-137), or “the domain of the sayable” (Butler *Excitable* 133), besides investigations about material power differentials (such as mobility and access). These investigations appear throughout this dissertation.

Moreover, dialogue has taken on a particularly unique definition in the current historical moment. The “historically novel phenomena” of “peace processes” (Selby 25) have characterized dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians over the past few decades in particularly unique ways that have produced dialogue as an end unto itself. Selby explains that the term “peace process” was first used in the mid-1970s “when American diplomats coined it as a label for the tentative thaw in relations between Israel, Syria and Egypt” (25) and that “the practice of making peace through a staged and protracted process of negotiation between enemies” is “historically unique” (13). This may seem like a broad claim by Selby given the colonial histories of Canada and the United States and the “protracted” or dubious “peace” processes imposed on indigenous peoples in North America. It is possible to think of the “peace process” movement that

Selby refers to as unique because of its emergence in tandem with the international foreign (predominantly European and American) “aid industry,” which has entrenched itself in the Middle East.

While many theorists continue to introduce new models of dialogue with different names, fundamental questions around power relations inherent to defining “constructive” dialogue remain essential. This dissertation does not aim to contribute to the psychoanalytic understanding of dialogue nor does it aim to propose any thorough method for creating the conditions for constructive dialogue (this might be the material of another dissertation and such propositions should come from the people participating in the dialogues themselves). However, this dissertation explores how dialogue is practiced and the outcomes of such practices. This is an important question as “peace process” dialogues continue to be thrust upon Israelis and Palestinians by North American and European actors (and now Israeli actors) in aggressive and persuasive ways.

### **Foreign Involvement and Ideological Encouragement to Dialogue**

Today, there are various organizations—local to Israel but largely emanating from North America and Europe—devoted to encouraging, organizing or facilitating Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.<sup>42</sup> They fund, organize and initiate

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<sup>42</sup> These dialogues are commonly conducted by foreign organizers and oftentimes operated in foreign countries. Examples include “small, confidential workshops” organized in the United States by American academics (e.g. by Harvard Professor

expensive conferences. Many Palestinians (particularly youth and women) in the West Bank, who are otherwise relatively immobile due to checkpoint and border restrictions, are offered letters of invitation to politically assist them with border-crossing into Europe or the United States. Palestinians and Israelis are given hotel rooms and expensive dinners in order to dialogue with “the other” who, back home, live a short drive away. After these trips, participants return to their lives in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel, sometimes returning to refugee camps and often separated by political and topographical conditions (such as innumerable checkpoints).<sup>43</sup>

The “peace process” as Selby notes was also supported by a general political, popular and academic discourse on the ways that globalization’s border-crossing effects might have the potential to create peace. Some academic, political, economic and popular celebratory discourse on globalization’s abilities to help people cross borders and enter an era of “cosmopolitan post-nationalism”

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Hebert Kelman) that “brought together” leading Israelis and Palestinians for several days and an Israeli peace movement called “Peace Now” which began dialogues with leading Palestinians in the occupied territories and in Europe (Golan and Kamal 201).

<sup>43</sup> Within Israel’s “proper” borders “inter-group encounters have been widely used” since the 1980s “as a means of promoting coexistence between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority” (Steinberg 471). The two groups “live in separate neighborhoods and do not meet on a day-to-day basis” so formalized dialogues and encounters have been encouraged (471). A case study of a “co-existence” group in Israel proper makes up chapter five of Cynthia Cockburn’s *The Space between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict* (1998). Much of this dialogue remain “interpersonal” without adequately addressing core politics subjects such as the right of return and its characteristics are much different than the dialogues that occur between Israeli women and Palestinian women *living in the West Bank*.

(16) wherein “traditional identities” decline seems to suggest, for example, that people will become more interested in shopping and going to McDonald’s than fighting (Friedman, *The Lexus* 16). Such discourse attaches a particular value to cross-cultural encounters (i.e. dialogue) for the resolution of “intergroup differences” and conflicts (James 588). In the same spirit, economists celebrate global liberalizing economies while academic peace studies groups uphold “intercultural dialogue” as “a basis for mutual understanding of group values” (James 587) particularly in “conflict” areas. Popular discourse on the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Revolution often celebrates the internet’s ability to connect people (with access to ICTs) across nations. Often these celebrations focus on commodity and cultural exchanges and do not equally focus on the various political, cultural and economic separations that globalization has either instigated or intensified.

Jan Selby argues that the dynamics of globalization and peace dialogues often include the erection of borders. “It is simply not the case that globalization is reducing the significance of borders” (20), he writes:

The increased global flows of capital and bodies that are the hallmarks of globalization have been paralleled by a proliferation of new forms of border control, regulation and surveillance. At the extreme, the result has been the construction of towering militarized walls and electrified fences—along the US-Mexican border; around Spain’s North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla; between Indian-and Pakistani- controlled Kashmir; and most notoriously around and inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Davis, 2005). Such fortifications do not simply arise out of the failure of peacemaking; India’s fencing of Kashmir occurred concurrently

with its dialogue with Pakistan, and with its espousal of a ‘soft borders’ approach to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute, while the Oslo peace process was marked from its inception by an ever-tightening physical and bureaucratic ‘matrix of control’ of the Palestinian (Halper, 2005). (Selby 21)

Selby counters claims that a global knowledge economy which makes communication borders easier to cross and is perceived to be “rendering borders irrelevant” (for example through the Information Communication Technology Revolution) alleviates “the depth of contemporary conflicts and inequalities” (21). For Selby, “borders and barriers are more relevant than ever” (21). The globalization-brings-peace ideology, however, formed the basis of various dialogue initiatives in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues to inform such initiatives in many circles today.

For women, the general international encouragement of cross-border encounters between Israelis and Palestinians is compounded by the simultaneous contemporary impulse towards recognizing a “common womanhood” across race and class (see Anderlini for an example of the argument promoting women-centred peace talks based on “common womanhood” and motherhood). The consequence was an exhortation to dialogue with women from radically dissimilar environments and who possess various political goals.<sup>44</sup> American and European

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<sup>44</sup> The roots of such impulses originate from American women abolitionists in the mid-1800s when women’s rights advocates began to turn their energies to “uniting women worldwide in a peace movement” (Daly 1486). For example, Julia Ward Howe wrote an antiwar article in the 1870s entitled “Appeal to Womanhood throughout the World” which called on women “to unite across

feminist movements have also historically been interested in travelling to meet women in “foreign” regions in ways that the reverse does not match.<sup>45</sup>

Today, these impulses have taken many forms. There is the creation of formalized “transnational feminist networks” (TFNs) which have worked in tandem with globalization’s effects to bring “social movements together across borders in a ‘transnational public sphere’” (Moghadam 4), such as the *Sisterhood is Global Institute* (SIGI) and the *Association for Women’s Rights in Development* (AWID). There are also more formalized impulses aimed at constructing a sense of shared womanhood through international organizations such as the *UN Division for the Advancement of Women* and the *United Nations Development Fund for Women* (UNIFEM). The latter is the women’s fund at the UN and “provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality” (<http://www.unifem.org/>). UNIFEM has also been active in organizing “peace” conferences between Israeli and Palestinian women such as the two day conference in Madrid held in the summer of 2010 called “Advancing Women’s Leadership for Sustainable Peace in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and Worldwide,” an effort to mark the ten-year anniversary of the UN Security

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national borders to prevent the waste of human life” (Swerdlow qtd. in Daly 1486).

<sup>45</sup> These initiatives differ from the kinds of geographically local feminisms that Palestinian and Egyptian women formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as they advocated for women’s education rights “across borders.” Palestinian and Egyptian women connected based on their shared political goals, geography and culture.

Council resolution 1325 on including women in peace-building efforts. NGO work and UN work (encompassing conservative, liberal and radical viewpoints) often encourages women to participate in dialogue with the incentive or reward-system of attaining NGO training, funding of events and the building of help-centres (which provide well paying jobs in the increasingly impoverished occupied territories) as well as inclusion in international events which serve as stages to voice concerns about important political issues.

Notions of “womanpower” (Morgan 3) are echoed in a plethora of books and articles devoted to the idea of women as a global community who are connected through shared experiences of social identities or global capitalist and patriarchal practices. For example, *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women’s Movement Anthology* (1984) is a compilation of women’s writings from sixty-nine nations ranging from all over the globe. The editor of the anthology, Robin Morgan, argues that women constitute “a world political force” (1). According to Morgan “those who suffer most from ‘the world’s problems’ are *women*, who, in addition, are not consulted about possible solutions” (1, emphasis in original). The anthology was published in the mid-80s, compiled and created over two decades during which the first and second World Conferences on Women (in Mexico and Copenhagen) were held. Thus the work of establishing contacts and interlocking activities of the world’s women (3) needed in order to write this book was part of a larger world movement working to bring women together to discuss their “common ground.” The work of this anthology and the



general work of global feminist conferences and connections during this period represented, to Morgan, an emerging foundation “now solid enough to support a genuine global movement of women which will have enormous political impact through the end of [the twentieth] century, and will create a transnational transformation in the next century” (3).

There is much support from hegemonic institutions, for these “outward” bound or East-facing, international women-only initiatives (on various and sometimes conflicting grounds). They have taken many forms in practice. For example, sometimes Orientalist concepts of the victim-Arab woman<sup>46</sup> seep into the dialogues operating within TFNs. Some TFNs today have a grasp of anti-racist critiques of Orientalist feminisms, for example, and try to avoid condescending and injurious appeals to notions of “global womanhood,” taking into account, to various degrees, women’s differences. Elisabeth Porter admits that “[t]he challenge of creating dialogue across differences can be enormous, particularly where deep discord and mistrust have complex historical roots and

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<sup>46</sup> During George W. Bush’s presidency in the United States of America, for example, attacking Iraq and Afghanistan was rationalized as being carried out for the sake of the *other* women of those nations, even while feminist politics at home were being compromised by Bush’s policies. Such dynamics have historical roots in processes of colonizing the Middle East. For example, Lord Cromer, the British consul general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907, would often report back on the Middle East by declaring “the inferiority of Islamic religion and society” and the weakness of the “mind of the Oriental” through “how Islam treated women” (Viner). Narratives like this were used to rationalize British rule in the Middle East. However, at the same time, Cromer founded and presided over the Men’s League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage in England, which tried, by any means possible, to stop women from getting the vote (Viner). Such processes singled out the Arab-Muslim woman as a student of the West, eventually to be liberated by it.

thus pain, fear of the unknown and suspicion of others prevail” (90). However, she endorses coalition work, particularly between women, because she argues that dialogue generally relies “on common, shared interests which can be the focus of attention rather than the divisive elements that are inherent in all groups” (83). She explains: “women often draw on their common tasks as mothers and/or nurturers to build coalitions across hostile differences” (83). Porter offers an anecdote to illustrate her thesis:

In 2000, the second Palestinian *intifada* had been raging when a young Israeli woman, Natalia Wiesteltier, telephoned the wrong number and started talking with an Arab living in Gaza. A tenuous bridge established and a project, ‘Hello Shalom/Hallo Salaam’, to encourage dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians developed. This grew into Families Forum, an organization of Palestinians and Israelis who have lost family members in the conflict. Their view of reconciliation is that it ‘allows each side to transform precisely those views about the other side that lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. This transformation creates trust between the two sides’ (Barnea and Shinar 2005: 497). (Porter 171)

While her anecdote does not isolate women participants and helpfully contextualizes the importance of the family structure to the participants involved, Porter continues to insist that women are the ideal participants for dialogue throughout her text. She argues that underlying the transformation of beliefs “is empathy for victims from the opposing side” (171), and she celebrates women’s workshops in Israel and Palestine, arguing that “[t]he discussion was more constructive than in mixed-gender groups” because there is “more empathy” (83). She argues, drawing on D’Estree and Babbitt, that “women may be able to make a significant contribution during the pre-negotiation phase, in which the building

of relationships and empathy is a key component for breaking down mistrust and polarization” (1998: 205 qtd. in Porter 83-4). However, as I argued earlier in the section on dialogue, there is an emphasis on interpersonal connection in such dialogues and furthermore, empathy does not always produce fair dialogue nor does it have the effect of altering “outside” conditions which necessitated the dialogue in the first place.

Porter’s selection of women as ideal dialoguing and “peace” participants who are more capable of empathy and nurturing is part of a larger feminist (and sometimes non-feminist) discourse on the commonality of women across the globe and their heightened propensity towards compromise. Jewish feminist Simone Susskind, organizer of the Brussels Conference (and president of the Jewish Secular Cultural Community Center at the time) defended her premise for a woman-only peace conference:

My idea was that women, who have dabbled less in politics and are less imprisoned by ideological concepts and less divided by psychological barriers, might be more prepared to listen and talk to one another without prejudice (Susskind in Galilee qtd. in Young *Keepers* 53).

Such discourses on global womanhood (as ways to overcome psychological and ideological barriers) have worked to encourage the formation of Israeli and Palestinian women’s dialogue groups. These rationalizations assume that the issues between Israeli and Palestinian women are primarily “psychological” barriers, rather than political, economic or social ones. Thorough engagements

with real differences (i.e. class, colonial roles) between the women (some of whom are complicit in perpetuating these differences) are lacking.

Despite the emphasis on dialogue in feminist and peace studies paradigms, dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian women is increasingly tenuous and scarce. As early as 1995, Simona Sharoni noted that political alliances between Israeli Jewish and Palestinian women were “almost non-existent” (Powers 5). While some informal and personal dialogues continue to occur in malls or in classrooms (say, in Jerusalem where Palestinians from the West Bank and Israelis can still meet, although rarely) between ordinary Israelis and Palestinians, all institutionalized, sponsored and formalized dialogues between Israelis and Palestinians (from the occupied territories) are under strict scrutiny by Palestinian women and feminists. In the next chapter, I explore the relationships between the ideological paradigms for dialogue as they exist today, and the ways they are practiced on the ground, to make sense of today’s dialogue realities.

## **Chapter One: On Today's Breakdown of Dialogue: Material Borders**

There are various reasons for the disappearance of dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian women. This chapter seeks to give an “overall” picture of the context for dialogue by describing the material or topographical prohibitions to dialogue, and it also surveys women’s opinions, through interviews, about their experiences in dialogue. My thinking here is that material borders and discursive environments are parts of one another, and they mutually inform one another. Moreover, the opinions of the women may not always be lucidly or unproblematically articulated but they serve as a window into the general sense on-the-ground. Thus the interviews are not meant to be “answers” but the prompts for my research questions. I will also supplement this survey with my own observations and experiences with material borders in the region.

### **On the Material (Im)possibilities of Dialogue between Women**

Sitting on a westbound bus traveling from Ramallah (West Bank) to Jerusalem in the heat and amidst traffic I arrived at the sizeable Qalandia checkpoint through which everyone entering Jerusalem from the West Bank must pass. The bus driver yelled out “Anyone without a foreign passport, get out.” I watched as Palestinians, many of them women, carrying children or bags of food, walked out of the bus and over to a white building. There were only a few of us left on the bus all holding passports from other countries, called “V.I.P” passports

by the bus driver. I never saw the inside of the building to which the Palestinians were walking. The bus then passed all the stopped and waiting cars that carried Palestinians without foreign passports (Palestinians who know no other home country), and we stopped at a checkpoint. A young armed soldier walked down the aisle of the bus, looking at our faces, then at our passports, then back to our faces. The soldier stopped at a young woman carrying shopping bags. “Where is your *hawiyi* (passport)?” he demanded. She looked startled, scared, just staring at the soldier with open eyes. “I don’t know,” she answered, “I think my sister has it.” She looked bewildered. The soldier yelled, “Get out!” and the girl, after hesitating and looking around, left the bus. People told her to take her shopping bags, but she just kept walking. I watched her walk towards the white building, across from the sniper tower. I grazed my hand over my passport, feeling the ridges on the cover.



Figure Five: Qalandia Checkpoint: En Route from Ramallah to Jerusalem. Cars on the left are entering Ramallah from Jerusalem. Buses on the right are entering Jerusalem from Ramallah. (February 2009).

Courtesy: Wafaa Hasan



Figure Six: Palestinians without foreign passports walk from the Jerusalem-bound bus (from which this photo was taken) towards the checkpoint/processing center inside the white building (February 2009).

Courtesy: Wafa Hasan

On the “other” side of the Qalandia checkpoint our bus waited to fill up with Palestinians who had just passed through the checkpoint, none of whom were the original passengers. This was the drop-off pick-up system because it would take too long for the buses to wait for their original passengers and there was no guarantee they would pass through anyway. Our bus picked up Palestinians who had arrived at the checkpoint hours before. A few of the V.I.P. passengers asked the bus driver to wait for the lady who was kicked off because her bags were still on the bus. My partner left the bus with the lady’s bags and

looked around for her, but we could not enter the white building. Thirty minutes later the bus left. I stared at the six bags full of food and clothing the entire bus ride. I didn't know what was in them (whether they included items for her planned day, a gift for someone? Food for company? Long-saved-for goods?). All I knew was that if she were successful in exiting the white building, she'd be looking for her bus and her things, and they would not be there. There seemed to be an air of resignation in the bus and we rode in silence. Interestingly no one took her seat or her bags. This is a brief and simple example of a trip from Ramallah to Jerusalem (only a short drive away).

Traveling throughout the West Bank and Jerusalem it was clear that Palestinian and Israeli women are increasingly separated by material borders. While the bulk of this dissertation is interested in the ways the discursive environment creates separations between Palestinian and Israeli women, it is important to contemplate the ways the increasing physical and material barriers are prohibiting the mere possibility of dialogue. Should discursive barriers lessen between Israeli and Palestinian women, material barriers would continue to hinder their communication. Moreover, because it is more difficult for a Palestinian woman to travel west into Israel than it is for an Israeli woman to travel east into the West Bank, the material environment makes literal and concrete the eastward orientation of Orientalist discourse. In this sense, the material and discursive environments inform and enforce one another.



Palestinian women and Israeli women are not equally restricted from mobility. While they are separated from each other in various ways, Israeli women enjoy a high degree of mobility around Israel and even in parts of the occupied Palestinian territories (particularly through the use of “Jewish only roads” (Aloni)). Palestinian women are not only unable to meet with Israeli women; they are prevented or even barred from meeting with *other Palestinians* because of material barriers. Palestinian women living in the West Bank are unable to travel through the region with ease even if they are going to the Palestinian neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem. If they are not outright prohibited from travelling to Jerusalem or to central cities in the West Bank like Ramallah (for Palestinian women living in northern parts of the West Bank), the unpredictability, along with the too frequently traumatic and arduous nature of the journey discourages them from doing so. The fifteen kilometers between Ramallah and Jerusalem involves waiting at the Qalandia checkpoint which can be taxing and strenuous. Traveling from Tul Karem to Ramallah (normally a twenty minute drive) can take hours, if roads are not closed entirely. Indeed, travelling through the West Bank involves hours at checkpoints, long line-ups, and intimidating and intrusive examinations by soldiers. It also requires adaptations by Palestinian travelers to unpredictable changes in curfews, checkpoint set-ups and policies.

In the West Bank, in particular, Israeli infrastructures like settlements and outposts add to the “geographic, political and economic fragmentation” of the

West Bank (Occupied). In 2006, the UN reported that the number of checkpoints and obstacles had increased by 40% in the West Bank from 2005: from 376 to 528 (The Associated Press). In 2007 the “number of physical obstacles, including checkpoints, increased from 528 to 563” and these have continued to “impede access to workplaces, markets, and health and education services” (“Consolidated”). By September 2008 there were 699 closure obstacles in the West Bank, making 74 % of the main routes in the West Bank controlled by checkpoints or blocked entirely (“Checkpoints”). Indeed, *Physicians for Human Rights* states that Israel’s “siege policy has made it almost impossible for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to move around in the region” and this has affected every aspect of daily life (Swisa, “Harm” 5).

The checkpoints’ impediment to mobility in the West Bank is intensified by the illegal wall. The wall imposes restrictions on Palestinians’ movement and “their ability to reach their farms or to travel to other Palestinian villages and towns” (Massad 21). Eligibility requirements for Palestinians entering the closed area to the west of the Barrier in the northern West Bank continue to tighten, reflecting ever-increasing restrictions on Palestinian development in Area C (60% of the West Bank) (Occupied).<sup>47</sup> The advisory opinion of the International Court

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<sup>47</sup> During the Oslo Accord Agreements in 1993, the West Bank (22% of historic Palestine) was to be assigned to the Palestinian Authority for full control. In the coming years however, the West Bank was divided between three areas: A, B and C. A was to be under full Palestinian control, area B was to be under Palestinian civil control but occupied by Israeli forces that would control mobility and borders, and area C was to be under full Israeli control and comprised of settlements and roads to and from settlements as well as buffer zones. For images

of Justice confirms that “those parts of the Barrier built inside the West Bank (90% of the route) are contrary to international law” (Occupied). However, the wall continues to be built and the goals of Israel’s proposed road map shows that the West Bank will be effectively separated into segregated cantons once the wall is completed (Massad 25).

In addition to physical road-blocks, road barriers, road gates, checkpoints, partial checkpoints, earth mounds, dirt piles, concrete blocks, trenches and the continuously growing wall, Israel’s road regime in the West Bank adds to frustrations in mobility for Palestinians. According to the Israeli human rights organization *B’Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, this “forbidden roads regime” is “based on the principle of separation through discrimination” as “the right of every person to travel in the West Bank is based on his or her national origin” (Lein 3). The system “bears striking similarities to the racist apartheid regime that existed in South Africa until 1994” except that it becomes a daunting task to identify it because the system has never been put on paper, “neither in military legislation nor in any official decision” (Lein 3). As such, the enforcement of such a system relies on a great deal of “arbitrariness,” more so “than was the case with the regime that existed in South Africa” (Lein 3).

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illustrating Area A, B and C visit:  
[http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/Oslo-2.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/Oslo-2.html).

In order to travel, even for a short distance—that is, in order to go about daily errands, attend school and work and visit family—Palestinians have to plan ahead and allow for more time than would customarily be needed to conduct the business of daily life. Palestinians often leave their homes before sunrise or hours before they are scheduled to work or go to school in order to avoid long line-ups at checkpoints. They plead with soldiers or find creative, alternative routes (often in hills without paved roads and walking paths when the need arises, risking being shot by snipers or assault by the Israeli Defense Forces /Israeli Occupation Forces).<sup>48</sup> If Palestinians are caught evading checkpoints, they are beaten, shot at, tortured and/or verbally or psychologically abused, as recorded by *B'Tselem* (see Stein). Nonetheless, the checkpoint system is unpredictable and so cannot be negotiated by giving oneself extra time. Checkpoints are erected, closed and opened with relative spontaneity. According to *Palestine Monitor*, “flying” or random checkpoints come and go in large numbers: “In the period from April to September 2008 the weekly average of flying (or random) checkpoints was 89.” *Palestine Monitor* notes that because of the “unpredictable nature and more intensive search procedures, the flying checkpoints are usually even more problematic for the Palestinians than the regular ones” (“Checkpoints”).

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<sup>48</sup> In one interview, young students recounted to me efforts to reach their university exams when a major checkpoint was closed. They traveled through hills and were caught by IDF/IOF soldiers and beaten severely. Such experiences, according to the students, were quite common.

All in all, it is impossible to pin down the exact number of checkpoints at any given time with certainty or to keep up with spontaneous curfews enforced by live ammunition and tear gas (Swisa, “Lethal” 6). Indeed, “the criteria for passage change frequently and often depend on the goodwill of the soldiers” (Stein 17). Israel’s current trend under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of privatizing checkpoints in the West Bank, has led to an increasing amount of “regularized” checkpoints that would operate like a “customer service” building. Such checkpoints are said to remedy this arbitrariness and “friction” through professionalization. Checkpoints would become buildings made up of contained rooms with unidirectional glass where a Palestinian never sees an Israeli and questioning can be conducted without external observation.

Neve Gordon, an Israeli academic, highlights the removal of the “annoying, bothersome eye of the activists and the organizations concerned about human rights, like the Israeli women’s group *Machsom* (Checkpoint) Watch” (qtd. in Maoz 15) as one of the dangers of professionalizing the checkpoints. The professionalization of these checkpoints will make the lives of Palestinians trying to go about their daily lives even more difficult. In fact, privatized checkpoints will allow the IDF/IOF to wash its hands of responsibility for human rights violations (Gordon 322, 324). Rules set up at privatized checkpoints will pass as the business of a corporation running the checkpoint rather than the business of the Israeli government and its policies. Thus “professionalism” may heighten, but at the cost of further dehumanization.

Palestinians often negotiate with IDF soldiers and bargain for entry and exits. Now even this sense of control, however slight, will be lost through the corridor system. New arbitrary and inexplicable rules like the restriction to only “Five pitas, one container of hummus and canned tuna, one small bottle or can of beverage, one or two slices of cheese, a few spoonfuls of sugar, and 5 to 10 olives” per Palestinian and no “cooking utensils and work tools” if one wishes to pass through the checkpoint just south of Tul Karem (Hass “Privately Run”) will be the business of corporate ethics. Therefore the privatization of checkpoints will not only continue to reduce control over daily life and planning for Palestinians; corporate based checkpoints will be harder to work against, with anonymous managers fielding human rights concerns rather than well-known and internationally watched political public figures that are directly accountable to Israeli citizens. Now there will be a “middle-man” between the creator of the checkpoint and those who have to pass them. Corporate professionalism can divorce itself from the philosophical question of the existence of the checkpoints and rationalize its work as following orders without political motivation.

The sum of these material borders means that Palestinians cannot plan a doctor’s appointment, go to a school exam, plan weddings, see friends, engage in social networks, work in business, or earn a decent livelihood without worrying about whether they will be able to get to their destination and then get back home again. This lack of control has many dire effects on Palestinian mental health leading to high levels of anxiety, resentment, resignation, fear, sadness, anger and

Post Traumatic Stress Disorders. Indeed, the closures and the wall have “negative impacts on social relations” (Massad 54). Families, relatives and social networks are separated. Social communication becomes a time-consuming process because of “impossible permits” and the re-routing of paths from quick direct roads to the long, detouring ones made available to Palestinians. Moreover, women are also often sexually harassed at checkpoints, where male Israeli soldiers ask about their personal lives, keep them longer than needed, look their bodies up and down and make comments about their physical appearance or age (see *Checkpoints* documentary). Therefore some Palestinian women avoid traveling to avoid harassment. All of these processes mean that, Palestinian women living in the West Bank have been comprehensively disconnected from Palestinian women living in Gaza since 1988 (“Checkpoints”), and relationships between women living in the West Bank are constantly strained by these restrictions on their mobility.

During interviews with Palestinian women in 2007 and 2009, I was often asked if I could send greetings to the women I was going to meet with afterwards in a different city. Some coveted brochures from the previous interviewees from a nearby city, asking if they could keep them. During the 2009 interviews in particular, I intended to discuss with my interviewees a national women’s brochure from the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). While there was a consensus among all the Palestinian women I spoke with that Palestinian women should no longer dialogue or conduct

activities with Israeli women (even if the word “boycott” was not explicitly used) few had seen this brochure. I anticipated that I would ask the Palestinian women how they came to author the brochure together, often beginning the conversation with “I’m sure you’re familiar with this” and asking for elaboration. Instead Palestinian women interviewees went quiet, reading the text curiously and ignoring me and the interview for a short while. Sometimes we sat and read through the text together. I quickly became aware that women working for the same organizations (say, the *Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling*) throughout the West Bank and living relatively close to each other were for the most part unable to communicate with one another. While Palestinian women activists in the region know each other’s names and are aware of each other’s work they do not see each other often, sometimes for years, even if they live a mere twenty-minute drive away from one another.

The International Women’s Day (IWD) events in March 2009 were telling examples of this fragmentation as rallies, marches, talks and conferences were organized in small cities or villages that were not far from each other. Each village or city hosted its own events. There were groups of a few hundred women in major cities like Ramallah and Jerusalem but much smaller groups came out in Hebron and Tul Karem, for example. The events were so arbitrarily divided according to checkpoints that women who could travel to more than one city (i.e. women who had the “right” traveling documents) traveled to two events in one day to see women colleagues (provided that the traffic and line ups were not too



long). According to Palestinian women in interviews in 2009, the events are organized on small scale geographical criteria based on the probability that Palestinian women will be refused passage at various checkpoints throughout the West Bank. The smaller scale events are organized to ensure all Palestinian women have a support system on IWD, no matter how small. However, Palestinian women have also historically made a concerted effort to create localized women's committees in villages that functioned autonomously "to make it more difficult for the Israeli authorities to destroy the organization as a whole" (Young *Keepers* 46). When Israeli authorities would ransack and close down a center for several weeks, other centers continued to function (Mansour and Giacaman qtd. in Young *Keepers* 46).

The day after IWD, I decided to travel to Hebron to see the continuing Women's Day events and when I merged into the endless line-up at a checkpoint towards *wad il Nar*, I instantly realized exactly how arduous the trip was from one city to the next. Palestinians waiting in the line, denied access to Jewish roads, took to getting out of their cars (when the line was long enough that the Israeli soldiers could not see them), socializing with each other, smoking cigarettes, and even selling food on the side of the road as a way to pass the time and ease the frustration. Palestinian women in the West Bank frequently mention their inability to travel and consolidate communications with allies. Thus the possibilities for relationships between Israeli and Palestinian women are

precluded by these barriers (in ways that they were not in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Wall did not exist and the checkpoint system was not so severe).

As of 2001 it became illegal for Israeli citizens to travel into Area A (areas under full Palestinian control) in the West Bank (“Checkpoints”), although this is lightly enforced.<sup>49</sup> From 2002 to the present, the entry of Palestinian workers into Israel has been drastically restricted (“Checkpoints”). When Israeli and Palestinian women, then, relied on meeting in Jerusalem or in areas like Ramallah or Jericho where Israeli women can easily go via settler/Jewish-only roads, few Palestinian women could make the journey successfully because of administrative restrictions “on access to East Jerusalem” (Occupied), among other cities. One Palestinian woman I interviewed from Hebron complains:

I can't tell you how many times I've organized conferences with Israeli women in 'common' areas like Jerusalem, Jericho or even Ramallah. On the day, after all of our planning, we are refused at checkpoints. We are stuck in our cities or villages. We cannot attend. And the Israeli women wait, arriving on time and prepared. This is the problem. How can we worry about a women's conference and women's work when we cannot even get to the meetings? We cannot go anywhere!

Whether for the lack of permits and passports or the arbitrary decisions of the soldiers at checkpoints, often in the purported name of security, Palestinian women cannot effectively participate, even after preparing agendas for weeks and setting up the premises of the meetings themselves. The frustration of these connections not only illuminates the immobility of Palestinian women, it also

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<sup>49</sup> More recently Israelis along with the Palestinian Authority (PA) are enforcing the zoning policies of area A, B, and C. This does affect Israelis trying to get into the West Bank but the restrictions continue to be frail.

highlights the power difference between the two groups of women. The inability for Palestinian women to take part in transnational conferences in Israel and Palestine, because of the Israeli occupation, means that not only is the *nature* of feminist solidarities being shaped by the occupation; the occupation is determining whether they *exist*.

### **Voices On-the-Ground: Everyday Views on Israeli-Palestinian Women's Dialogue**

While much of the separation between Israeli and Palestinian women can be explained by the simple arduousness of material borders which prevent Palestinian women and Israeli women from communicating in person, Palestinian women, especially those living in West Jerusalem or those savvy with the internet, still have the ability to connect with Israeli women electronically by email or phone, although email connections and cell phone service in the occupied territories are often and unpredictably compromised because of, amongst other things, Israeli imposed obstructions and interruptions). However, despite recent increases in access to such technologies, most Palestinian women are *choosing not to* connect with Israeli feminist activists. I asked Palestinian women from different backgrounds, who had been involved in dialogue groups in the past, to explain why the lively Israeli-Palestinian activities of the first *intifada* and of the early 1990s are now virtually nonexistent.

Interestingly, it was difficult to get most Palestinian women to admit they had ever engaged in such dialogue groups. The women of the *Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling* in Hebron, for example, talked liberally about incest, domestic and sexual abuse by Palestinian men towards Palestinian women and children in West Bank refugee camps (normally taboo subjects in Palestinian culture), but even they looked at each other nervously when asked if they had ever been involved in joint dialogue groups. One woman finally blurted out, "I did, but for a very short time!" After this first admission, the others slowly agreed that they too had some experience in joint dialogue groups. Once this was established, the women began to tell me about their experiences but continually insisted that such interactions no longer exist. There seemed to be an emerging social taboo about these dialogue groups that did not exist in the 1990s. Perhaps they had become less socially acceptable.

Ghada Sughayar, of *Aman/Transparency Palestine* in Ramallah, began our conversation with a strong assertion: "I would like to say in general the Palestinian people are not for [...] joint ventures between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Many of the initiatives are publicly refused" (Sughayar, as mentioned, was the first executive director of the Palestinian component of the Jerusalem Link). Speaking from her vast experience in Israeli-Palestinian women's activities, Sughayar argues that while joint dialogues are generally refused, she has her particular reasons for disengagement which are "at least according to my own experience." She explains "[The initiatives] were not coming from bottom

up, they were imposed.” When I asked “by whom?” she named “different agendas” like “the official formal agenda of the Israeli government and later on the Palestinian Authority when it was established in the early nineties,” and sometimes “a donor driven agenda.” According to Sughayar, the *Link* began as a grassroots organization:<sup>50</sup>

Decisions used to come from the bottom: the decisions came from women activists, women’s NGOs who believe that women have to be part of any solution; they have to be part of any negotiations process; they have to be heard very well by all the decision makers at all levels in [sic] both sides etc.

But, Sughayar explains, the initiative took on an “institutionalized form in 1993” and she submitted her resignation by 1996:

After almost 3 years and after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority when I felt that a lot of pressure is placed on the policies of our centre by the Palestinian Authority—and I had some negative or tense relationships with the Palestinian Authority when we held some workshops against some violent actions by the Palestinian security forces against activists such as the incidents in Nablus, they were very furious—I felt that they wanted the Jerusalem Center for Women to be the voice of the Palestinian Authority and I had not joined this initiative to be the voice of the government or to be the voice of the Palestinian Authority.

Sughayar emphasizes that her activism works to expose human rights violations from *any* institution and within any nationality and states that she will work “against the Israeli government, the Israeli authorities, the occupation authorities *or even against the Palestinian Authority if they really exercise any kind of violations to human rights!*” (Sughayar’s emphasis). At the same time, she is an

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<sup>50</sup> Sughayar’s interview was conducted in English. Grammatical mistakes have not been corrected.

avid supporter of the boycott of Israeli feminist dialogue and activist groups. Her boycott is not an easy form of the “patriarchal bargain” (Kandiyoti, “Bargaining”)<sup>51</sup> which looks to gain power by acquiescing to male rules about the limits of feminism (particularly in the service of nation-state liberation), however. Sughayar, a women’s rights activist (she no longer wants to be called a “feminist”) and someone who works against both Israeli occupation and corruption by the PA, has decided to draw a line when it comes to dialoguing with self-declared Israeli feminists who are “anti-occupation.”

It is important to note that the accounts below from “critical” Palestinian feminist activists as to “why” they have boycotted, coincide, more or less, with interviews I conducted and informal conversations I had with “ordinary” and non-activist Palestinian women doctors, housewives and farmers. The following section outlines the interviewee responses according to four comments that were typical (also outlined in the “Introduction”): the “top down” approach, “Israeli women fall down on feminist principles,” “Israeli activists are too few and ineffective,” and “the whole pyramid is upside down.” I provide direct quotations about these sentiments in the following paragraphs to anchor this dissertation’s critical analyses of Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues (seen in Chapter Two

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<sup>51</sup> The patriarchal bargain, according to Deniz Kandiyoti, is a set of “women's strategies and coping mechanisms” within a system of “concrete constraints.” Kandiyoti argues that “different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct ‘rules of the game’ and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression” (“Bargaining” 274).

and Three).

### **The “Top Down” Approach**

Ghada Sughayar describes her experiences working with Israeli women activists, during her days at the Jerusalem Link in the early 1990s, as condescending towards Arab women. Sughayar recalls:

I remember trying to issue a statement on the occasion of annexing East Jerusalem to Israel. Each time or each year we used to publish a statement on events like demonstrations etc. And I do remember how many times these statements went back and forth between me and the other centre which is called *Bat Shalom* in West Jerusalem, the twin centre [...]. Sometimes I had almost thirty copies, thirty drafts of a single statement which is half a page or maximum one page.

When probed about this revision process Sughayar explained:

Yes! Editing and revisions! Because of political differences and because of political stances. Now, I do remember that this created a lot of problems between me and the director of *Bat Shalom* [...] at that time and she complained to her board of directors and her board of directors complained to my board of directors and they were complaining that they didn't like the way I handled the things you know? They wanted me to immediately accept what is offered on the table.

[...]

This left us with what? Each time, we had a meeting, to discuss important issues, we received a concept note from them [*Bat Shalom*] regarding the issue! Or a statement or even if we want to work together on a certain project and we want to establish a concept note for that project like the project “shared or sharing Jerusalem” they do the concept note and we have only to read through this concept note and to modify here and there but the vision remains an Israeli vision.

They create it and we do only some *taghyeerat taghmeeleeyi* [grammatical and semantic changes]...not in depth. In many cases I had a problem with

the vision itself. Everything comes, well most things, come in conformity with the Israeli vision but not in conformity with the Palestinian vision.

Sughayar goes on to describe her discernment of condescension in her correspondence with Israeli women of the Jerusalem Link:

Concerning my relationship or *our* relationship with the Israeli women, it was very problematic. The Israeli women looked at us—maybe because we had some weaknesses and we had some faults and we're not well organized and well prepared—they always looked in a very ...*tareeka fowqeeyi ghiddan* [They looked down on us in an elitist fashion]—as if they are the bosses and we are just their slaves or their employees.

[...] As if they have to order you to do something and you have to obey it and then to do it. They don't look at us as equal partners... that we have to share everything together, we have to decide together. *No* they don't. I hated this attitude so much from them...the arrogant attitude...they are so arrogant and I hate this arrogance!<sup>52</sup>

Sughayar gestures to the ways collaborative projects turned into authoritative ones in which one side of the dialogue consisted of authors and the other of readers or receivers.

For Sughayar the delineations between these two roles were not just between Israeli and Palestinian, they were between “white” and non-white women. She elaborates on the workings of race (as well as constructs of East and West) within the dialogues of the Jerusalem Link:

Even Israeli women who were activists and part of *Bat Shalom*, on many cases complained to me about this attitude that they also receive from the Ashkenazi women in their organization. One of them, for example, she's a Jew from Morocco, she was called Fatmi before, and she was brought here to Israel with her family. They emigrated to Israel, and they changed her name to a less “Arabic” name.

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<sup>52</sup> The few words Sughayar spoke in Arabic were translated into English by me.



[...]

She on *many* cases, she used to complain to me about how terrible, how racist, the attitude towards her was in *Bat Shalom* itself.

Sughayar continues about racism in these feminist organizations describing how Ashkenazi Jews treat Ethiopian Jewish-Israelis: “They were looking in an inferior manner towards the rest of the [Jewish] women who come from Arab countries, from Ethiopia or even from Eastern Europe.” Sughayar’s eventual resignation, then, arose out of the pressure from both the patriarchal state institution of the PA to advocate on behalf of the “nation-state” and also from her experiences in “patronizing” models of solidarity from Israeli (primarily Ashkenazi) women within the Jerusalem Link.

### **“Israeli Women Fall Down on Feminist Principles”**

Many Palestinian women express distrust of the consistency of Israeli women’s solidarity work and blame this distrust on Israeli women’s loyalties to Zionist nationalism, particularly during states of exception which are controversially titled “wars.”<sup>53</sup> As Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas<sup>54</sup> asserts:

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<sup>53</sup> I put the term “war” in scare quotes because, as I show in chapter four, what Israel labels “war” is often labeled “ongoing occupation” by Palestinians. The temporal period of war, in a context of systemic violence, is often arbitrary and masks the ongoing colonial violence inherent in the region. The creation of an “event” creates a moment for “exception” during which Israelis often break ties with Palestinian women.

<sup>54</sup> Shamas’ interview was also conducted in English. Grammatical errors have been left uncorrected.

Israeli women have not—most of them—have not overcome their Zionist nationalism. Even if they are peace activists, the core of it is their Zionist indoctrination and upbringing when it really comes down to the core. When it comes to the Jewish state, if it's a Jewish state what about the non-Jews in the state? And what about the people who were forced out?

She says some Israeli “individuals” are “internationalists” but emphasizes that these are individuals and not *movements*<sup>55</sup>:

I have experiences but then I say okay I'm a feminist and I can see beyond my narrow nationalism. I come from fighting against injustice and injustice across the world is injustice, whether it's against your nation, against your body... it's injustice. So I can feel this sharply. And I understand that here we are Israelis and Palestinians fighting for the same land. We both have our national discourse but in the final analysis, a few generations from now, our kids will have to learn to live together. There's no way we can get rid of them, there's no way they can wipe us out, we both tried wars...we're still here. So I feel like now this is my political life/animal working in me is to...no matter how many or how few the women you *have* to find some sort of discourse with them *on the political platform*. And keep pushing the boundaries. With the group of women we are working with we really push boundaries on feminist issues because they claim they are feminists *but they fall down on issues like Gaza*.<sup>56</sup> (emphasis mine)

Shamas explains that in the IWC the Israeli feminist she was working with most intimately failed to take a radically anti-war stand against the recent attacks on Gaza. Shamas goes on,

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<sup>55</sup> This point about the lack of anti-Zionist feminist movements in Israel is brought up by other Palestinian women (including Islah Jad in her interview and Nahla Abdo in *Women and the Politics*) as I outline in various sections of the dissertation.

<sup>56</sup> By “Gaza” Shamas refers to (the Israeli titled), operation “Cast Lead” in December 2008 and January 2009. Palestinians did not title the attacks and therefore did not identify it as an extra-ordinary event.

The women I was working with supported [the attacks on] Gaza and we [Palestinian women] said this is against our platform so you can't be part of the group. We are women against war; we are against using human civilians as targets; and we're supposed to sign on to this? I find that Palestinian women are more clear and sharp on their feminist principles—on feminism and what feminism is—than Israeli women.

Ghada Sughayar argues that even the most “radical” Israeli feminists involved in women's alliance work were linked to *Meretz* or to the Labour party (largely male-run parties in the Knesset). Sughayar continues:

most of the women from the Israeli side, I had experience with them, they, at the end of the day, they might say *very nice words*, they might express their *support*, and their solidarity with you etc. but at the end of the day when it comes to a written statement, they are *very* committed to the agenda or the political setting of their party. [...] I don't feel that they have an independent vision or political stance, or political vision.

One woman I met on International Women's Day (2009) in Hebron, who asked to remain anonymous, spoke to me of a relationship she had created with a woman who worked at *B'Tselem* right up to 2009. She angrily recounts her sense of betrayal when during operation “Cast Lead” this woman did not call out Israel as the aggressive invader:

One woman from *B'Tselem* that I was close to supported the war in Gaza and would only go so far as to say that both sides should stop the fighting, equalizing their positions. It wasn't until the whole three week long assault was over, that she admitted to me that the attack on Gaza was wrong. But after what?

She goes on, with a tone of resignation:

Now when an Israeli woman approaches me to say let's work together for peace, my answer is 'I'm sorry.' Because of this experience, I now refuse. When the time comes that an Israeli comes that want to do peace I say I'm

sorry ...because of this experience I refuse. How are you going to liberate me? You're going to kill me? How are you going to liberate me? With your silence?<sup>57</sup> What freedom what peace? Israeli society doesn't want peace.

She went on to abruptly answer my question when I asked if she had any relationships with Israeli women: "For those Israelis who want human rights and those who are against human rights, for those who want peace and those who hate peace, for the right and the left, Israel is number one. They are all one hand. All of them."<sup>58</sup> While this is a highly essentialist statement that ignores differences and class systems within Israeli society, it conveys a sense that Israeli feminists are not perceived to be sufficiently dissident.

Islah Jad, Ghada Sughayar and Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas similarly point out the lack, within Israeli society, of an anti-occupation "movement" that does not subscribe to notions of ethnically-defined states (i.e. a Jewish state) and remain wedded to the two-state solution. Indeed Sughayar argues that "a true feminist movement" does not exist in Israel. She adds:

from my own experience with the Israeli women, with the left movement in Israel, I feel that women do not have an independent agenda. They are politically dependent on the mainstream agenda or the agendas of their parties.

Palestinian women admit that there are many Palestinian women activists who are likewise connected to nationalist parties or who use the feminist platform to

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<sup>57</sup> The concept of silence *within* dialogue will appear as the main topic of Chapter Five.

<sup>58</sup> My translation.

promote a particular political faction. In fact, Sughayar argues that while attachments to political parties have been ubiquitous on “both sides,” Palestinian women have been “able to separate themselves from government agendas much better than the Israelis.” She describes the current trend in the Palestinian women’s circles:

We have most of the women activists who were active in different political parties...most of them now are independent. They do not belong to the political parties anymore. [...] I do believe that women activists [...] in Palestine are much stronger than the Israeli activist women [because they] really succeeded to detach themselves from their political parties and detach their organizations from political parties. And they had of course, not in all cases, not all the women activists...

Shamas also argues that many Palestinian women in feminist circles continue to be involved with particular political parties and are complicit in becoming a communicative conduit for mostly-male political parties in feminist circles.

Interestingly, all the women I interviewed, save one living in Nablus (a housewife whose husband worked for Fatah and the PA) and also the women who worked for the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) (to different extents), enthusiastically critiqued the Palestinian Authority and expressed disdain for the rivalry between Fatah and Hamas. Palestinian women have a sense that anti-war and anti-nationalist (feminist) principles are not upheld consistently by Israeli feminist activists and express a deep distrust with Israeli-Palestinian women’s solidarity.

**“They are Too Few and Ineffective”**

Asked what she thought of Israeli anti-occupation activists, a woman living in the northwest of the West Bank seemed beleaguered by the question. Then she shrugged and said there was one time when the family had “seen a few.” The family members chimed in and quickly added, with a chuckle of resignation, “They don’t have any effect.” They recounted a story about an intense curfew they endured after the Al Aqsa/Second *intifada* when Israeli forces were building the apartheid wall on their farmland, separating them from their Jewish and Palestinian neighbors and annexing their familial, and historical agricultural land. The woman recounts the story while her nieces and nephews (who are between the ages of 6 and 17) interject to add details:

We were put under a curfew when the Israeli army came into our town. We were all under curfew and we had strict rules. No one could look outside their window without the risk of getting shot at. We couldn’t step outdoors, not even into our yard. There is a watchtower that watches us. During the curfew we could not go out to get food and the fear of approaching the windows and looking outside consumed [her niece]. She [the niece] went into a “shock” mode and has never been the same since. She did not speak or eat and rarely moved. Since then every time she hears an Israeli tank pass she goes into a state of shock and freezes. There were a few Israeli activists who came by for a couple of days to protest the building of the wall. We had a peek at them through our windows but we couldn’t get a good look. They came for a small length of time. But in the end, we emerged after the curfew to see that the army had quickly and successfully built a massive wall. Our land was gone and they [the IDF/IOF] were gone. The activists had no effect.<sup>59</sup>

The woman shrugged and stared at me.

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<sup>59</sup> Translation by Wafaa Hasan.



Figure Seven: The watchtower and wall which remains today.  
Courtesy: Wafaa Hasan

On International Women’s Day in Jerusalem the feeling that Israeli activists are “too few” and “ineffective” similarly resounded. Silwan is a highly Palestinian-populated small area in Jerusalem where the tenants (who have lived there for generations) have received eviction notices. Around the Palestinian homes a mural has been erected projecting images of a future Israeli “City of David” (an image of a park with “white” children—tourists?—running and laughing holding hands with adults). Interestingly the mural images do not differ all that much from the current reality of Silwan (with children running around and enjoying the land with their parents). Indigenous Palestinians were not only facing the continually precarious status of their IDs, the constant carving up of Arab Jerusalem which separates families and creates refugee camps, and the unofficial discrimination towards Palestinian applications for building permits (with

exorbitant fees and long waiting lists—sometimes as long as thirty years according to interviewees from Silwan); they were now facing imminent homelessness.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, Palestinian women commemorated International Women’s Day in 2009 by holding educational protests in a tent in Silwan. Palestinian women from the West Bank (those who were permitted to cross the Qalandia checkpoint) traveled to Jerusalem to express solidarity with the women of Silwan. The protest tent was mostly filled with women and girls, some wearing *hijabs*, others not, giving speeches, rallying the crowd and singing songs. There were no Israeli women.



Figure Eight: Silwan Protest Tent for IWD March 2009, Jerusalem  
Courtesy: Wafaa Hasan

<sup>60</sup> See

[http://www.btselem.org/english/jerusalem/20100628\\_jm\\_municipality\\_plans\\_to\\_demolish\\_22\\_houses\\_in\\_silwan.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/jerusalem/20100628_jm_municipality_plans_to_demolish_22_houses_in_silwan.asp),

[http://www.btselem.org/english/jerusalem/20081112\\_house\\_demolitions\\_in\\_silwan.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/jerusalem/20081112_house_demolitions_in_silwan.asp), and [http://www.btselem.org/English/Jerusalem/Discriminating\\_Policy.asp](http://www.btselem.org/English/Jerusalem/Discriminating_Policy.asp) for more information on Palestinian evictions and house demolitions in Silwan.





Figure Nine: “I am Palestinian”: A Poster of a Woman’s figure transposed onto a Tree with roots in the Earth, a Palestinian flag as the border, handed out on IWD in Silwan.

Courtesy: Wafaa Hasan



Figure Ten: Poster, among many, at the Silwan Tent Protest on IWD.

Courtesy: Wafaa Hasan

When I asked the Palestinian women in the tent whether Israeli women had come to the Silwan tent at any time in the day to express solidarity, they

looked at me with confused faces: “a few of them came the other day and they might come again. But so what?” It was not something in which they seemed to find much value. While Palestinian women were not able to separate their gender politics from their current politics of survival (as they are about to lose their homes, their means of survival, their perceived sense of history and belonging, about to be displaced) there was a sense that Israeli women had the privilege of separating this sense of crisis from the IWD celebrations. Even if they had attended, the interviewees made it clear that it would not really matter because they are “too few” and “ineffective.”<sup>61</sup> When Jad<sup>62</sup> talks about Israeli feminist work, she continually goes back to a haunting statistic: that “91% of Israelis supported the attacks on Gaza.” Jad indicates a kind of suspicion about the role of feminist work in the “whole” (of Israel) as a simultaneously complicit and exceptional activism. Such suspicions will be elaborated throughout the dissertation.

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<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that when Palestinian women made these repeated statements about Israeli feminists being “too few and ineffective” they still maintained a respect for those few individuals who put themselves on the line for anti-occupation, anti-colonial politics. It is neither their nor my intention to fault these few women but rather to draw attention to the material and discursive differences that frequently privilege the actions and viewpoints of Israeli activists at the expense of Palestinian activists, and that similarly make their activism more possible and less risky (but still not without risk). My point here is to highlight the feeling that Palestinian women exude about the “uselessness” of seeking Israeli solidarity and try to, throughout the dissertation, argue that the lack of a strong anti-colonial politics in the Israeli women’s *movement*, distinguished from individual activists (which is constrained by the mainstream colonial discursive environment) produces the feeling that Israeli activists are “too few and ineffective.” This will be elaborated throughout the dissertation.

<sup>62</sup> Jad’s interview was conducted in English. Grammatical errors were left uncorrected.

### **“The Whole Pyramid is put Upside Down”**

Islah Jad explains she was “personally involved in many activities” like “meetings, house meetings, public meetings, international conferences, seminars, lectures with Israeli women and men.” She argues that such endeavours took up a lot of her time “in the first Palestinian uprising.” Jad argues that “We [Palestinians] were urged to make the Israelis understand our situation and to feel our needs, to know about what we want etc.” by “small Israeli women groups in Israel.” Jad goes on to say that those Israeli women’s groups:

Were all the time demanding for us to come and give lectures, to meet women in their houses, they were organizing house meetings, public meetings etc. During these encounters, I realized it was so painful for me and most of the time, these encounters make me very emotional and angry from the type of questions we were confronted with as Palestinian women. One of the classic questions at the time was: how come you throw your little kids in the streets to be killed by our soldiers? How could you as mothers, you know, leave your children while Israeli tanks are firing in your areas?

Jad is visibly bothered by such questions:

I realized that we, by meeting the Israelis and the public at large, we were put in the accusation corner. That we were accused and we have to justify ourselves. By that time I felt that the whole pyramid is put upside down.

Jad argues that the Israeli women she was seeing saw “themselves only as victims and they don’t want to see the other as victimized by their politics at all.” Jad describes this dynamic as “very irritating” because she could “not understand how

Israelis had these perspectives about Palestinians.” Jad argues that within these dialogue groups and meetings:

We were completely demonized and demonized by the fact that we are resisting certain colonial control. And they don't see this as a resistance. They kept saying this is terrorism and homicide. So the basic, the basic ground was not there.

The questionings and the accusations Palestinian women perceive are being posed to them, especially with regards to Palestinian resistance activities (by children in particular), are manifested pervasively in dialogues between Israeli and Palestinian women. In Chapters Four and Five (as well as throughout other parts of the dissertation) I explore the problematic questioning of Palestinian women in a context where the “pyramid is upside down” or, in other words, when the colonial situation is not acknowledged as the foundation for dialogue.

In sum, Palestinian women express, through interviews, that (Ashkenazi) Israeli-Jewish women frequently use a condescending top-down approach towards Arab participants in dialogue; are inconsistently in solidarity with Palestinian women, particularly in times of exception, when they are torn between feminist and Zionist-nationalist allegiances; are ineffective at creating *movements* in Israel for feminist peace and are therefore *part of* Israel's hegemonic “whole”; and that, as a result, dialogue is not informed by an awareness of disparate power relations between Israeli and Palestinian women.

In the end, the direction of “flow” (from West to East) where Israelis can more easily enter Palestinian areas and Palestinians cannot enter Israeli areas because of elaborate military structures and state apparatuses mirrors the dynamics of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians in, amongst other ways, the direction of questionings. The following two chapters explore how this unequal access contributes to the “top-down approach” that plays out in a popular and an academic exchange between Israeli and Palestinian women.

## **Chapter Two: Orientalist Feminism, White Authority and *To Die in Jerusalem***

*To Die in Jerusalem* is a documentary film which features a live dialogue between an Israeli woman (Abigail) and a Palestinian woman (Um Samir). The dialogue is an example of the “top-down” approach Palestinian women refer to when speaking about Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues (both in the ways the dialogue is structured and organized by one side and also in the ways the ideological premises for dialogue are unilaterally imposed). It is not an academic text, nor one which claims to be highly critical. However, Cultural Studies’ attention to such popular forms of media production reveals quite lucidly how discursive ideology works. This analysis will be paired with an analysis of a seemingly more complex dialogue between anti-racist academic feminists in the next chapter. In this way, I use the popular film to sketch out the power dynamics in stark terms and move on to look at how these dynamics are present in a more self-consciously nuanced context as well. In *To Die*, Abigail gives us an example of the ways problematic feminist notions of “universal motherhood” and “global womanhood” are constantly referred to as *the basis* for dialogue. While Abigail does not declare herself a feminist, this dialogue is clearly influenced by the wide-reaching feminist discourses which link peace with womanhood (in this particular case, based on their reproductive capacities, assumed ability to nurture and mother, and presumed shared experiences).

When Abigail's constant insistence on the category of "womanhood" as a unifying identity is continually complicated by the discursive and material differences between the two women as well as by Um Samir's interjections, Abigail declares the dialogue a failure, and she is *able to* shut down the conversation. In this chapter, I explore the organizational structure of the film; the context within which it was produced and distributed; as well as the discursive frameworks within which the dialogue operates to argue that, with some minor exceptions, the dialogue is guided by the Israeli participant's decision-making abilities which are unmatched by the Palestinian woman's freedom to make decisions, as well as by a discursive framework of Orientalist feminism.

### **The Para-Text of *To Die in Jerusalem***

*To Die in Jerusalem* recounts the aftermath of the events that took place in 2002 in a Jerusalem market in which an eighteen-year-old Palestinian female, Ayat Al-Akhras, blew herself up and killed Rachel Levy, a seventeen-year-old Israeli female. When one inserts the DVD version of *To Die in Jerusalem* into the DVD player, four images roll across a red, black and white menu screen which displays three options (such as "Chapters" and "Play Film"). The four images that appear and disappear off the screen are of four different women. One woman is in a *hijab*, crying and wiping her tears. We later learn this is Um Samir, Ayat's Palestinian mother. The next is a woman without a *hijab*, talking and facing the camera, seemingly calm. We later learn that this is Rachel's Israeli mother,

Abigail Levy. The next image is a photo, similar to a formal school photo, of the dead Israeli female teenager, Rachel Levy. The final image is a photo of Ayat Al-Akhras, the teenage attacker, wearing a *kuffiyeh* on her head, holding a gun and staring into the camera. There is a faint sound of an ambulance siren in the background.

This film is described on the DVD case and on-line as being about “one mother’s journey to meet the mother of her daughter’s killer.” It goes on, “More than four years later, they finally meet in an emotionally charged encounter that underscores the deep roots of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.” As such, even though the film says it is about Abigail’s journey, it also sets up its climactic endpoint as the final dialogue between Abigail who is living in West Jerusalem and Um Samir who is living in the Deheisheh Refugee Camp in the West Bank. In combination with this declared focus on dialogue, parallel images of the two dead female teenagers on the DVD case strongly emphasize the relational and dialogical aspect of the film.<sup>63</sup>

Consistent with the film’s premise to follow Abigail’s journey, the titles and visual cover images of the chapters mostly represent Abigail’s face and her personal quest. The chapters’ titles and cover pages position Abigail as a protagonist, as the character with whom the audience shares a quest for answers

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<sup>63</sup> Many news stories about this event emphasized the similarities between the two women (their similarity in age and appearance). The story then has an inherently dialogical character in which we understand Ayat through Rachel and vice versa. Oftentimes news anchors remarked that they were oddly similar but still different.



and the person they see and hear most often. The title pages of the chapters to the DVD guide the story primarily around the Israeli mother's quest for answers, her grieving processes and her confrontations with Palestinians. Thus the dialogue between Um Samir and Abigail is already framed as Abigail's search for dialogue with and answers from Um Samir (and other Palestinians). Of the fifteen chapters in the film, seven feature a cover image of Abigail's body or face in various poses, stern, upset or laughing. These seven chapters often use first person titles and are respectively called "End of My Daughter," "Why did you Kill My Daughter," "Women's Prison," "Life After Death," "Deliberations," "Can't Speak Anymore," and "Abigail's Dream." Where the titles do not indicate an agential questioning from the Israeli mother, the titles are *about* Abigail, a dream she's had, her deliberations and her (and Rachel Levy's) life after death. Three of the fifteen chapters feature a cover-image of the two girls' faces (Ayat's and Rachel's). These chapters contain biographical information about the two girls as well as the details of their deaths with a strong focus on their similarities in appearance, age and injuries. The rest of the fifteen chapter cover-images feature an Israeli journalist (who calls Abu Samir to arrange the meeting); a Palestinian priest (who consoles a fearful and suspicious Abigail when she enters the West Bank); and the remaining three chapter images feature Palestinians.

Of the three chapters that feature images of Palestinians a video image of Ayat Al-Akhras is the representative image of chapter one called "The Opening" and a satellite television image of Ayat's parents represents chapter thirteen,

called “The Meeting.” In both of these images Palestinians are seen through the mediation of a television screen, so the audience sees Palestinians as they are *being seen* through mediations of technology (video and television). The invisible third person that is presumably *watching* these images becomes the main subject in these images and not the Palestinians themselves, who become the objects being watched. The third chapter with a cover image that includes a Palestinian is called “Women’s Prison.” This image shows a Palestinian woman being confronted by Abigail; the back and slight side profile of Abigail is closest to the camera and farther away is the Palestinian woman who is receiving the confrontation. Again, the Palestinian woman is not the subject of this image; rather, she is being seen as the Israeli woman sees her and through the mediation of the Israeli woman’s questioning. In this way the Israeli woman becomes the subject of this image (and thus I have included this chapter cover-image in my count of seven that represent Abigail). The sole chapter cover featuring Palestinians unmediated by technological representation occurs in chapter six entitled “Culture of Resistance.” This chapter displays an image of many Palestinian students performing the *dabke* dance in folkloric Palestinian clothing. This image does not individualize anyone in the same ways that Abigail is individualized in the other chapter images and titles. In sum, no single person in this film gets the first-person representation that Abigail is afforded in the chapter image menu.

The film begins with a blank screen and the sound of someone dialing buttons on a phone indicating a potential communication. An image appears (set in September 2002) of the Israeli mother, Abigail Levy, asking someone on the phone to find information on Ayat Al-Akhras' parents, or information on "the parents of my daughter's killer." The film then sets up Abigail's initiation of this quest for dialogue and answers as the premise for the coming chapters. Therefore, while the purported climax of the film is the "encounter" between the two women, the implied audience (Booth) is visually and organizationally positioned to follow (and identify with) Abigail's questions and deliberations.

This may be the intention of the producers of the film. It may have been created as a story about the journey of an Israeli woman; however, when the dialogue actually occurs, if the intention was to be an exchange with a Palestinian woman, the focus on the Israeli woman's authority and desires shapes and determines the dialogue itself. It is important to note that while the audience may not seamlessly adopt Abigail as a protagonist, depending on one's identification with the content of and identities in the film, *To Die* sets up Abigail's quest and her questions as the guiding narrative course. This structuring, I argue, reflects and parallels the ways in which the dialogue in the film is guided by, initiated and stopped by Abigail (the Israeli subject) at her discretion.

## Structures of Dialogue

The very initiation and organization of the dialogue in *To Die* reveals the ways that dialogue operates (when? where? and eventually what?) on Israeli terms. When Abigail says that she is too afraid to go to the Bethlehem in the West Bank—due to her fear of being killed—to dialogue with Um Samir but that Um Samir is welcome to come to her house in West Jerusalem, Um Samir responds that she has “no reservations about going” but “the Israeli checkpoints won’t let [her] pass.” At a later point in the film when Roni Shaked, an Israeli journalist, asks Abu Samir (Ayat’s father) for a meeting time for dialogue, Abu Samir responds that the refugee camp is under curfew until further notice. While Abigail, the Israeli woman, freely *decides*, and has the choice, not to go to Bethlehem in the West Bank, the Palestinian woman (and her family) simply *cannot* go to Israel (she does not have that choice). This is a relatively straightforward example of the disparity in levels of access and mobility between Abigail and Um Samir, further accentuated by Abigail’s reference to her regular travels to the United States. Um Samir’s inability to leave her camp or city is juxtaposed with the Israeli woman’s recounting of her relationship with America, stories of Rachel’s childhood and schooling abroad, and expressions of a future plan to go back to the United States.

As we see later in the film, Abigail enjoys full and unbridled mobility in the West Bank. She travels to the refugee camp without being questioned or

stopped and wanders through a Palestinian women's prison called HaSharon with an American TV crew. Abigail seems to walk right into the prison, strolling through open doors. She is not shown moving through civilian borders in the prison. For example, the audience never sees her showing identification papers to the prison staff or asking guards for access. The audience does not even see the person (presumably the guard) who opens the doors. Instead, the audience sees Abigail assertively and casually walking through a woman's prison. She looks for someone to answer her questions about her daughter's death. Finally a Palestinian prison officer yells out to a Palestinian woman prisoner: "Thuarah! They would like to speak to you. Do you want to do it?" The camera shows Thuarah's back. She does not vocally answer but begins to walk over (giving a sort of consent) and a dialogue ensues. This pattern is repeated with a few other women prisoners.

Although Israelis are not legally allowed into Palestinian controlled areas in the West Bank, this prohibition is often only enforced by a cautionary message, and the film suggests it is much easier for Israeli citizens to enter Palestinian-controlled areas than it is for Palestinians to enter Israel. Abigail's car is even filmed from the outside and inside as she passes through Israeli checkpoints. This would be a difficult feat for Palestinians crossing checkpoints (as videos and cameras are strictly forbidden around the IDF/IOF at checkpoints and borders).

Moreover, midway through the film, when Abigail decides to go to the West Bank (because the Palestinian family simply cannot travel to her), the film

crew ends up being questioned for four hours by the Palestinian police while Abigail sits in a church safely waiting with a Palestinian Christian priest. Upon the return of the film crew, Abigail insists on returning to Israel. She says she does not feel safe and that “it’s too dark.” The Palestinian priest shows her the outside of the Deheisheh refugee camp in which Ayat’s family lives and reminds her that she has already reached the destination but she anxiously asks to go back to Israel. In this journey, Abigail demonstrates agency to enter the West Bank and then to refuse dialogue and cross the border back into Israel, quite easily. Her decision-making powers are starkly different when juxtaposed to those of Um Samir, who waits inside her refugee camp home for those who choose to visit (as Um Samir’s home is controlled by foreign armies and she can accept visitors but cannot visit others unless they are within her camp or city). Reiterating my earlier discussion about the material borders that structure Palestinian lives, the film demonstrates how the borders heading eastward are porous while those heading westward towards Israel are almost impermeable.

The juxtaposition of the curfewed and “receiving” Palestinian woman with Abigail’s choices of “when” and “where” to travel create a shaky ground for dialogue in the first place, wherein disparities in access to dialogue are unequally distributed. One woman can decide when she will go to the West Bank and actively seek out dialogue while the other can only *await* the initiation of dialogue, were an Israeli woman to desire it. The Palestinian woman could not, for example, request to travel to Israel to meet Israelis or even to request the travel

of Israelis into her refugee camp for dialogue (if she desired answers from an Israeli killer of a Palestinian). This means that the Israeli woman would have to *want to* dialogue and would have to initiate that dialogue in order for it to take place. As such the premise for the dialogue itself is necessarily Israeli-inspired. This structural dynamic provides the foundations for “top-down” approaches in dialogue. We can recall that Ghada Sughayar’s insistence, in the section I quoted from her interview in Chapter One, that Palestinian women were routinely expected to “sign off” on documents instead of (co)/authoring them. Such dynamics are part of an Orientalist “top-down” discursive environment which pervades Um Samir and Abigail’s dialogues.

### **Eastward Dialogue for Western Knowledge**

The producers of *To Die*, the directors of photography (save one Palestinian with Israeli citizenship), and the composer are all Israelis who declare their completed military service in their bios on the film’s official website. The film’s executive producers (who helped both to produce and distribute the film) are John and Ed Priddy, co-founders of the Priddy Brothers, an American company based in Idaho. The film is also supported by The New Israeli Foundation for Cinema and Television, HBO documentary films, Israeli Television station “Yes,” and Marathon International.

The film was shown in film festivals and screened widely in countries all over the world including Hong Kong, South Africa, France, Poland, Italy, the United States, Switzerland, England, Spain and finally, in East Jerusalem (which is predominantly populated by Jewish Israeli citizens). However, *To Die* has never been screened in the West Bank and never, at least officially, in the Middle East. The Jerusalem Film Festival's website, aside from a label at the top of the front page which is written in Arabic, can be viewed only in Hebrew or English for locations, times and descriptions of films. All of the theatres and sites for film screenings were in East Jerusalem in Jewish theatres and places that are psychologically and physically off-limits to Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, and geographically off-limits to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. It would be completely impossible for Um Samir (the co-participant in the dialogue in the film), for example, to attend such a screening. Moreover, it would be nearly impossible for any Palestinian living in the West Bank to view the film (unless it was aired on satellite television). I saw the film on Canadian television stations and on a satellite channel broadcasting from the U.S. It is possible that this film was aired on Arabic television stations via satellite but it is difficult to confirm this. The film was produced and is being consumed in North America, Europe and Israel: it was made for an implied "Western" audience by "Western" actors. As a result, the Palestinian participants and dialoguers in the film are not permitted or encouraged to continue in the dialogue surrounding the reception, distribution and reflection on the film. Their answers to Israeli questions appear as static objects to



be consumed in their absence and in a radically different socio-political context than their own.

The Jerusalem film festival, the closest site of film screening for Palestinians, describes itself as “dedicated to The Jewish Experience, dealing with issues of Jewish identity and history, In the Spirit of Freedom, concerned with questions of freedom and human rights” as well as “a central and unique space to [sic] Israeli film” (“About the Festival”). Therefore the context of the screening of the film in Jerusalem is set up to be about the self-discovery of Jewish-Israelis. The film festival is self-described as showcasing Israeli films: however, Israeli films are explicitly equated with the “Jewish experience,” thereby excluding many non-Jewish Israeli citizens, such as Palestinian Israelis (Druze, Christian and Muslim) from its cultural vision and audience. This process of producing and distributing *To Die* parallels dynamics within the dialogue itself in which Palestinians, even those who are predominant figures in *To Die*, are simply conduits for Israeli self-learning to be consumed without being corporeally met. Um Samir is a figure that Abigail must see and confront to heal her own wounds. The Palestinian is sought as a conduit for Israeli self-discovery, becoming a static object in Abigail’s story of Rachel’s death and her own healing process.

Through her research question, “why?” Abigail explains the impetus for her quest in dialoguing (and arguably the basis for the film itself) with Um Samir: “I wanted to know why.” She repeats, “I wanted to know why. Why you hate me

so much that you kill my daughter.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, when Abigail’s friends and support systems encourage her to abandon conversations with the ‘other,’ saying “don’t expect too much from them [Palestinians],” Abigail responds, “I hate them! I don’t love them! I hate them! However, I’m very curious to meet them [...] we are not going to kiss them or hug them. We’re going to tell them we don’t trust them anymore.” Abigail’s “curiosity” to meet the other is preceded by her assurance that she will not be embracing the other’s contribution to the dialogue but that she wants to make an authoritative declaration about the other’s failures. The other, then, is spoken about in a kind of anthropological study.

The Israeli’s ability to cross a border, see the ‘other’ and report back to the Western world without the “other” having the opportunity to engage its own representation during the reception of the film mimics the role of the colonialist traveler or the missionary feminist who undertakes a conventional Orientalist anthropological survey of the other and returns home to report back and create a static knowledge of that *other*. She then defines herself in relation to and through this other. The structural set-up for similar accountabilities in dialogue and reciprocal questionings is frustrated by the problematic power relations of military occupation.

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<sup>64</sup> Sometimes Abigail’s question “why?” seems more like a command than a question as she does not use an intonation of inquisition.

## The Dialogue

In this section, I delve into the details and offer a textual analysis of the dialogue in *To Die*, but first an abridged transcript of the final “live” dialogue between Abigail and Um Samir (as well as Abu Samir, who speaks briefly at the beginning of the conversation) is essential. This transcript also includes my descriptions of body language and communicative actions that are non-verbal in an effort to impart a fuller picture of the dialogue. The film’s textual narrator explains that, because Abigail, Um Samir and Abu Samir are unable to meet in person, they will meet over satellite. Um Samir is shown getting into a car to travel to the place where the satellite has been set up. Abigail is shown sitting on what looks like her living room couch while the satellite cord is being looped up through her windows and a television is being set up in front of her. She stares at the television. The television images of both women come up and the conversation begins:<sup>65</sup>

Abigail: “Hi Um Ayat. Abu Ayat. Long time wait for this meeting. I wanted to see you Um Ayat for a long time to talk to you. I’m very very excited right now.”

[Abigail starts crying. Abu Samir and Um Samir stare into the camera.]

Abigail: “I think that this thing is between me and you as a mother. Me as a mother and you as a mother. My daughter Rachel was a beautiful girl...”

[Abigail goes on to describe her daughter. Um Samir describes hers.]

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<sup>65</sup> While this dialogue is very long for quoted material in a dissertation it is imperative to include most of it in this chapter in the interests of supporting and contextualizing the analysis that follows.

Um Samir: “[Ayat] was often asking me why we weren’t in our hometown like the rest of the world in their homes. She wanted to go to pray at Al Aqsa, it is prohibited, to go to Yaffa, it’s prohibited. She used to ask why? Why are we the only people for whom everything is prohibited? I would tell her that God wanted it that way and that God willing things will quiet down [that peace will come] and we will return to Yaffa and peace would prevail all over and that patience is a virtue.”

Abigail: “What is ‘peace’ really? If we gonna start. What is a peace for you? You said you came from Jaffa and you want to go back to Jaffa?”

Um Samir: “Peace? Does peace mean that we remain under occupation? You are not under occupation. We are the oppressed, the imprisoned—with the killings and assassinations! We are the ones living under those conditions. We have become like fish in a sealed can!”

Abigail: “I don’t want to talk about politics. You continue to blame the occupation for all the problems that you have. You should think different because this is not the only reason that you live the way you live!”

[Abu Samir interjects]

Abu Samir: “Abigail, listen, listen. The conditions which we are in as well as yourself are all because of the occupation. We are victims of the occupation. You and I are victims of this occupation.”

The audience is taken into Abigail’s living room where she is watching him speak but his voice becomes inaudible even while he continues to speak. Instead the audience hears Abigail complaining to the crew, “why is the father there? I don’t want to hear him—I don’t understand.”

[...]

[Consequently, the filming crew zooms Abigail’s television screen lens to focus only on Um Samir, thereby cutting out Abu Samir from the image and the conversation.]

Abigail: “Um Ayat, I want to talk to you as a mother and I want you to listen to me mother to a mother.”

Um Samir: “I feel you. You are a mother and I’m a mother. You’ve sacrificed as I’ve sacrificed. But you are not living under an occupation. You are the occupier.”

Abigail: “If you go to this way, you’re never gonna live in peace!”

Um Samir: “I invite you to come live with us to see our conditions and see how we live. The crimes are beyond description! Killing bombardments-demolitions!

In front of our home a car with two people inside was attacked by missiles. That made [Ayat] go mad!”

Abigail: “I can’t speak anymore. I’m so confused. I don’t know what I’m saying.”

[Abigail takes a moment to think, head in her hand, closed eyes, thinking.]

Abigail continues: “Did you know where she’s going, what she’s doing? Did you know what she was gonna do before she went?”

Um Samir: “I didn’t know. No one who knows would accept such a thing. No mother would allow her daughter to do that. I never knew. She went to school. We didn’t know. We heard it on the television just as you did. We were watching the news.”

Abigail: “You wanna tell me that she decide one day to come and kill herself?”

Um Samir: “She was a mature eighteen year old-not some kid. Eighteen years old and she chose her own way. She thought it was right-you would think it was wrong. People have different views.”

Abigail: “I wanna tell you something and it’s very hard. Your daughter and my daughter got killed for nothing! You didn’t get nothing and I didn’t receive nothing.”

Um Samir: “For you it was nothing-but for her people it was something. For her cause and her honor it was something. What she went through you did not live through. We are living in misery. My people are living in a camp. We have nothing. [Our] window opens into [our] neighbor’s window—a street is one meter wide.”

Abigail: “You keep saying about your misery and your pain...”

Um Samir: “Would you take that? Would you? When America was a colony what did it do? When France was occupied what did it do? Algeria? The whole world has gained its freedom except Palestine. Occupation requires resistance. You wouldn’t accept that-I wouldn’t accept that. But she found that to be her way.”

Abigail [with pointing finger]: “I don’t think that you knew about your daughter. I don’t think that you knew your daughter at all.”

Um Samir: “I did not know about my daughter. Nobody knows their daughters.”

Abigail: “I knew my daughter very well. My daughter never never never gonna kill someone for nothing.”

Um Samir: “That’s because your daughter is happy. She’s not under occupation.”

Abigail: “NO NO NO!”

Um Samir [With pointing finger and yelling defensively]: “Because you’re not living under occupation-under oppression under the crimes of occupation. You are talking from a position of comfort. We talk from a position of hardship.”

Abigail: “You don’t do nothing to solve the problem. You just complain. You just cry all the time like a baby. To solve the problem you have to start from yourself. To start from you. You know my daughter, the roots of my daughter...even if I forced her to kill, she’s not gonna kill. If I tell with a knife to go and kill Arab people, she’s not gonna do it because she know that killing it’s wrong. Sometimes when I think about my daughter I think about her too. I’m sure that Ayat was a victim. A victim!”

Um Samir: “I am with you. I agree with what you say. I support what you say. But the reality we are living is different from what we hope for you and I.”

Abigail: “You have a lot of hate toward us. Alot. From the past. It’s not from the last *intifada*, it’s not from 67 it’s not from 48. It’s the hate that you felt towards us it’s from a long time! Ok?”

Um Samir: “My dear, how would I love you when you have stolen my land and my country? How would I love you? Give me back my rights and I won’t mind if you live in my home! I want to explain one more thing-when there is occupation there is resistance!”

Abigail: “No I don’t understand. As I told you in the beginning there’s nothing more important than life ok? No resistance, no everything... whatever you said.”

Um Samir: “Should I resist occupation with a bouquet of roses? On a tray of gold?”

Abigail: “I don’t ask for you to bring me nothing. I want you as a mother...ok? To say that this is not the way to solve problem. I want you to talk with other children and say to them that what Ayat did is wrong.”

Um Samir: “Kids don’t need us to explain anything. Ayat didn’t consult with me. She saw what was going on and did what was necessary. Ayat chose her way and took it! I’m saying I want peace. How will peace emerge? Let’s join hands and work for peace!”

Abigail: “How can I shake your hands if you believe that what your daughter did it’s the way?! You have to say that the way of killing this is not the way of peace.”

[...]

Abigail: “You’re not gonna receive your wishes and I’m not gonna receive mine. me and you have to think about the future not the past ok? We have other children. You have more children and I have more children and nobody, nobody, not your leaders and not everybody and not your other martyrs that will kill other Jewish people will solve the problem. Believe me it’s gonna be worse and worse. You know what’s gonna help? If you as a mother, will stood up against all of your leaders, me and you, we’ll shake hands and stand up and say no more violence. Because violence cannot solve nothing. Me and you will say the first thing of peace is talking. Teach me about your problem and I’ll teach you about mine.”

Um Samir: “What you are thinking about is far away.”

Abigail: “No it’s not. It’s not far away. We can bring it!”

Um Samir: “You wish and I wish but reality is something else. You and I are poor souls that can’t do a thing. We are lost under their feet. You are a casualty and I am a casualty. Those governments of ours don’t listen to you or me. All of what you say is right. The kings and presidents are in a different world. [...] You and I are casualties lost under their feet.”

Abigail: “Do you think about my daughter sometimes? Do you see her sometimes in your dreams the way I see your daughter?”

Um Samir: “A lot. A lot. Because she’s a victim and I’m a victim. But I want to ask one last question-one final question so that peace may emerge. What is the solution that gives me my rights?”

Abigail [finger pointing]: “First of all, ok, if you stand up in front of TV and say for the whole of Palestinian mothers that what your daughter did is not a good way to solve the problem and whatever left is the hole in your heart.”

Um Samir [interrupts]: “ok when we see that we have regained our rights, our land, authority, our government, when we see our child prisoners freed, our homes rebuilt then I would go on TV, on the satellite stations, and say we want peace!”

Abigail [calmly]: “You know I’m so disappointed from you, I’m so disappointed from you, because all of your messages you’re sending signs of wars and hate.”

Um Samir: “No don’t be disappointed with me. I only told you the reality. My message since Ayat’s day is the same.”

[People begin walking in front of camera obstructing Um Samir’s vision of the television screen, signaling the end of the conversation]

Um Samir continues: “I call for peace. Not surrender! Peace. You seek surrender-not peace! The Palestinian people will never surrender! And from Ayat there will be a million Ayats.”

Abigail: “Um Ayat, I’m very sorry I just wanna tell you I’m sorry I’m sorry that it’s end up like this. Because there is no way that we can come to any solution”

Um Samir: “I cannot hear you”

Abigail: “but when I hear you I can’t be optimistic”

Um Samir: “no, stay optimistic”

Abigail: “in your words I saw a lot of hate”

Um Samir: “I’m just speaking of the reality I live”

[...]

Abigail: “Do you think one day we can talk to each other and leave all the politics behind us?”

Um Samir: “Inshallah” / God willing...may God curse all politics! Let’s be done with politics. Let’s be done with politics-you and I.”

Abigail: “Can I take [the ear piece] out?”

[pause]

Um Samir...“Let me take [the ear piece] out”

This conversation is initiated and terminated by Abigail. She speaks first, and she leads the conversation by pausing when she needs to, directing the questions and topics, deciding on inclusion and exclusion of Abu Samir at will and finally withdrawing when the conversation has “failed.” When Um Samir invites Abigail to “come live with us to see our conditions and see how we live” and then lists off “crimes [...] beyond description” explaining that they made Ayat “go mad,” Abigail stops the dialogue and says “I can’t speak anymore. I’m so confused. I don’t know what I’m saying.” There ensues a pause, and Um Samir



stays quiet. Abigail then re-directs the conversation, “Did you know where [Ayat was] going, what she’s doing? Did you know what she was gonna do before she went?” When Um Samir responds by critiquing Abigail’s society and the criminal actions of Israel, Abigail abruptly re-focuses the conversation on the Palestinian’s crime. The conversation is limited to the event of Ayat’s killing of Rachel, and Abigail deems the contexts around the event irrelevant, dismissing them as “political” or words of “hate.”

In an effort to disrupt Abigail’s control of the dialogue Um Samir reverses some questions and offers powerful contextualizations (providing possibilities for the viewer to dis-identify with Abigail, with whom the film intends us to follow). While the conversation is set up, by the film’s narrative, to answer Abigail’s questions, Um Samir interrupts this flow by asking questions too. For example, when Abigail asks Um Samir, “What is peace for you?” Um Samir responds with her own question, “Peace? Does peace mean that we remain under occupation?” and then goes on to explain the hardships of the occupation. Later Abigail responds to Um Samir’s description of Palestinians’ hardship with, “You keep saying about your misery and your pain...” when Um Samir interrupts abruptly and exclaims, “Would you take that? Would you?” A powerful moment of pause follows. Abigail does not answer these questions. Finally, at the end of the conversation, Abigail invokes motherhood again and asks: “Do you think about my daughter sometimes? Do you see her sometimes in your dreams the way I see your daughter?” Um Samir responds “a lot” but immediately moves on to ask a

final question, “What is the solution that gives me my rights?” Abigail does not completely ignore this question as she does with previous questions but she positions Um Samir as the problem when she says: only when Um Samir denounces Ayat’s actions will peace come. While these moments in which the Palestinian is able to question the Israeli are not responded to or seemingly even heard by Abigail, they become moments in which the question is posed for the audience to ponder.

Reverse questionings are not the only disruptions in the film. At various points in the dialogue, Um Samir asks Abigail to imagine herself in the shoes of the occupied person requesting “symmetrical reciprocity” (Benhabib qtd. in Young, “Comments” 166). Symmetrical reciprocity occurs when one admonishes another to imagine how they would feel if another did what they did to them (Young, “Comments” 166).<sup>66</sup> While Iris Marion Young claims that such symmetrical reciprocities are limited by the deep-seated differences between people (168), asking someone to imagine your circumstances seems like a promising strategy in attaining sympathies (although we have seen the limits of empathy in the Introduction). Um Samir tries this strategy and assertively exclaims, “I invite you to come live with us to see our conditions and see how we live.” Yet Abigail dismisses this suggestion.

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<sup>66</sup> Earlier in the film, Abu Samir too, poses a question, “Ask yourself why do we live in the camp? I am from Yaffa. Why do we live here in the camp? Ask yourself!”

According to reader-response theory or reception theory, “the interpretive activities of readers, rather than the author’s intentions or the text’s structure, explain a text’s significance and aesthetic value” (Goldstein 793). The founding theorists of reception theory, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, argue that the audience of a text has authorial agency in that there is a potential for “*negotiation*” and “*opposition*” on the part of the audience (“Reception”). This means that a “text” (a film, book or other creative work) is not always passively accepted by the audience and the author’s intentions do not always reflect the audience’s reception and interpretation of the text. Indeed, readers and viewers interpret texts “based on their individual cultural background and life experiences” (“Reception”). However, according to Iser, notions of “scientific objectivity” or a “classical, ‘absolute’ norm” can conceal “‘hidden meanings’ and stifl[e] the reader’s imagination” (Goldstein 793). While Iser “believes that a ‘potential’ of the text admits other readings, which represent other potentials,” he still maintains that a text “establishes norms guiding and limiting readers” (Goldstein 794). In *The Act of Reading*, Iser argues that “‘The process of assembling the meaning of the text...does not lead to daydreaming but to the fulfillment of conditions that have already been structured in the text’” (qtd. in Goldstein 794). The text’s potentials lie in “indeterminate gaps, blanks, discrepancies, and absences” which can “disturb the structure and stimulate the reader’s activity” (qtd. in Goldstein 794) but the text “‘still signals, guides, directs, and manipulates them, moving them to reinterpret the text’” (qtd. in Goldstein 794).

Disruptive moments in *To Die* invite an active viewer's interpretive agency, and the film medium can be rewound and repeated such that Um Samir's questions linger in the Western imagination as the film is distributed throughout North America. These conversations can be re-played and viewed in isolated excerpts and in various contexts in which the audience may not identify with Abigail. However, as Iser argues, the possibilities for such interpretations are still limited. Moreover, Um Samir's discursive disruptions come at the cost of having her voice eventually silenced when Abigail cuts off the conversation. When Abigail decides she has had enough, the film crew begins to walk in front of the camera obstructing Um Samir's vision of the television screen while Um Samir tries to continue to speak: "I call for peace. Not surrender! Peace. You seek surrender-not peace!" Abigail, in her position of arbitrator of the film, concludes: "there is no way that we can come to any solution."

Just before Abigail ends the conversation she declares, "in your words I saw a lot of hate" and asks if one day they could "leave all the politics behind." Um Samir responds, "Insha-Allah" / God willing...may God curse all politics! Let's be done with politics. Let's be done with politics-you and I." Abigail's equation of Um Samir's "political" talk with "hate" works to position her ostensibly "interpersonal" conversation around motherhood with "peace," as peace has been connected with interpersonal "apolitical" dialogue (Sharoni 136-

143).<sup>67</sup> Abigail's judgment that dialogue is a failure (by turning to the film crew, seemingly disinterested and asking: "Can I take [the ear piece] out?") works to invalidate Um Samir's questions and other narrative disruptions in the film. The dynamic here of "Western authority" and Eastward tutelage becomes overt when Abigail notes that she is "*so disappointed* from you [Um Samir]" (emphasis mine). Disappointment is defined as the failure to fulfill expectations or wishes and Um Samir responds "No don't be disappointed with me. I only told you the reality." What is the larger discursive environment that permits Abigail to control the dialogue so? The following section situates the "naturalization" of these types of unilateral dialogues within the larger discursive environment.

### **Orientalist Discursive Environments in Dialogue**

Abigail's dismissals and control of the dialogue seem natural and logical because Orientalist ideologies have normalized these unequal dynamics. Structural disparities in personal power, for example, between Abigail and Um Samir are glided over by the film's Israeli participants as "natural" to the implied (and exclusively sought out) Western audience. That is, when they are not explicitly rationalized by Abigail as justifiable and even virtuous (as rationalized

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<sup>67</sup> "Politics" or the "political" is defined inadequately and vaguely by Abigail, although there is a sense that she equates any discussion of broader issues of the occupation to "politics" which, for her seems to be unrelated to "motherhood," the basis on which she seeks dialogue.

*consequences* of Palestinian violence), they are more subtly naturalized through the discourses of Eastward pedagogy.

Abigail's role as arbitrator, mediator, initiator, questioner and manager of the dialogue's environment goes unquestioned by the Israeli figures in the film (such as Israeli journalist Roni Shaked and Abigail's Israeli friends). When Shaked visits Abigail's house and telephones Ayat Al-Akhras' parents on behalf of Abigail in order to set up the dialogue-meeting (two years after the bombing took place), the disparities in levels of agency between the Israeli and the Palestinian woman are naturalized and ignored. Shaked asks Abu Samir (Ayat's father who answers the telephone) if they can have coffee (in fluent Arabic). Abu Samir replies that they cannot meet because they are currently "under curfew." Shaked continues, apparently unaffected by this answer, to ask if Abu Samir and his wife would meet with Abigail if there were not a curfew. Abu Samir quietly replies "sure." Shaked's non-reaction to the curfew indicates a kind of complicity with the political conditions of power in the region. Moreover, it indicates that the curfew itself is not a matter for dialogue, as it is not connected to the subject of the dialogue that he seeks to set up. Rachel's death—the purported subject of the meeting—*contains* the dialogue and acts as an event that limits the scope of the dialogue and thus her death becomes an isolated incident for which Abigail seeks answers, one that is disconnected from the realities affecting the ability for the Israeli and Palestinian mothers to dialogue. Reacting as though the curfew were a simple (and normalized) inconvenience, the Israelis continue to ask if they can

meet when the Palestinians are *not* under curfew. These moments when the disparity in decision-making abilities, levels of mobility and access to knowledge production resources between Abigail and Um Samir appear, are presented as “natural.” They do not make up the content of dialogue. Such power relations rely upon the truth regimes of Orientalism in order to maintain their appearance as naturalized and logical.

Orientalism is a lucid example of a Foucauldian discourse, a discursive system or a “regime of truth” (Hall, *Critical* 135-138) which allows one to construct a topic in a particular way through a formation of “statements” and signifiers (Barthes). These statements and signifiers, a combination of language and practice, exist in relation to each other in such a way that they add up to a system, a discursive system or regime which not only constructs “truths” but “also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed” (Hall, “The West” 201). According to Edward Said, the Orient is an idea, constructed through “Western” eyes, that makes up part of a Western (and now international) discursive system, one that creates a homogenized Orient that has “reality and presence in and for the West” (Said 5):

The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part. Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial

office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural person-ality, national or religious character. (Said 8)

As the Orient became a subject of study for the West and now, arguably, internationally as this discourse has been disseminated through Western forms of knowledge production, there emerged a set of beliefs and statements about it.

Said argues that Arab roles in cinema, for example, typically characterize Arabs as lecherous and dishonest. The Arab “appears as an oversexed degenerate, capable [...] of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low. Slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colorful scoundrel” (Said 287). Said further argues that “The Arab is a sign for dumbness combined with hopeless overarticulateness, poverty combined with excess” (320).<sup>68</sup> Moreover, “the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures of Arabs in general, represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures” (287). And finally, “Lurking behind these images is the menace of *jihad*” and the “fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world” (287). Orientalism relies on the juxtaposition of the Arab with the Westerner. Indeed Arab leaders “of marauders, pirates, ‘native’ insurgents” were often portrayed and seen “snarling at the captured Western hero and the blond girl (both of them steeped in wholesomeness), ‘My men are going to kill you, but—they like to amuse

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<sup>68</sup> The Arabic language is reduced to exaggeration for example (Said 320).



themselves before” (Said 287). “Essential ideas” about the Orient, “its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness” were distilled and formed (in relation to the West) in the nineteenth century to create “a separate and unchallenged coherence” (Said 205), a discursive system called Orientalism.

Today, European Orientalism is embedded in American discourse about the Middle East (see Said 287-288, 295) and in mainstream Israeli political discourse. The predominant Western and Zionist vision for Israel represents “the modernizing imperative in a region seen as still marked by the biblical backwardness of its Arab inhabitants” (Goldberg 27). According to Said, the contemporary Orientalist sees the Orient “as an imitation West” (Said 66, 132) which, according to various authors, including Bernard Lewis, “can only improve itself when its nationalism ‘is prepared to come to terms with the West’” (321). Seeing the Orient as an unsuccessful imitation of the West rationalized former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir’s famous statement that “the Palestinian people did not exist” (Goldberg 28; see also Hass, “Historical”). Of course, there were people in Palestine but these were not considered a civilized people by their colonizers and were therefore negligible or disposable. Israeli settlement in Palestine from the late 1800s on was informed by the same logic as the civilizing mission of Europe or “the white man’s burden” (Goldberg 26) towards “the non-existent, existent people of the ‘exotic’ Orient” (Hass “Historical”). According to

Goldberg, Moses Hess was “one of the first to articulate the Zionist vision” in 1862 when he told the Jewish “race” to:

be the bearers of civilization to peoples who are still inexperienced and their teachers in the European sciences, to which your race has contributed so much... [Jews are to be] mediators between Europe and far Asia, opening the roads that lead to India and China—those unknown regions which must ultimately be thrown open to civilization... [Jewish] labour and industry [in Palestine] will turn the ancient soil into fruitful valleys, reclaiming it from the encroaching sands of the desert. (Hess 1995 [1862] qtd. in Goldberg 27)

While Israel represents “modernization, progress, industry and industriousness, looking to the bright future, the civilizing mission of the best that has been thought and could be taught” (Goldberg 27), Palestine “represents the past, failed effort if effort at all, antique land still tilled by hand and the perennial failure of governance, a place constantly in the grip of its time past and passed” (27).

Orientalism manifests in various ways throughout the text of *To Die*: Abigail’s and the American company’s impulse to curiously view the Palestinian and report back on her without involving her in the process is a form of making a science about the Palestinian. Furthermore, the de-individualization of the Palestinian in the chapter image-titles of *To Die* works to continue to place the Palestinian within the imagined angry *mob* of Arabs so historically imagined in Orientalist texts. But the dynamics of *civilizing* power are *particularly* accentuated in *To Die* when Abigail adopts a role as an overseeing authority, arbiter, and judge when she talks about Ayat’s family. In a conversation between Abigail and Roni Shaked, the Israeli journalist, Abigail remarks: “I heard [Um

Samir] filed an appeal so that Israel won't destroy her house. Why does she deserve this privilege?" "I don't think she deserves it," "This is why I want to know what she has to say." Abigail "naturally" takes on a powerful role (as a citizen-representative of Israel) in which she can assess Um Samir's right to her own shelter. The idea that a "foreign" governmental authority or worse, an ordinary citizen can decide on whether to collectively punish a family or community (based on the actions of a person to whom they are linked) under *another* governmental authority is informed by a paternalistic understanding of Israelis' roles in Palestine. Within the narrative of the non-existent, or continually imitating but never-fully-civilized Palestinians, the Palestinian can be governed by anybody who so pleases to take on this burden to control an un-governable people. The role that Israel plays in punishing, controlling and policing the Palestinians in their own territory is normalized as primarily benevolent, even while the occupation is deemed illegal by international law.

In Orientalist logic the curfews and the house demolitions constitute violence that the victims brought onto themselves. As Sherene Razack argues in "A Hole in the Wall; A Rose at a Checkpoint: The Spatiality of Colonial Encounters in Occupied Palestine," Western law forgives colonial violence by either "viewing the instances of violence as exceptional and/or considering that the victims brought the violence on themselves – it is they who are dysfunctional, sick, prostituting themselves, posing a security threat, and so on" ("A Hole" 92). That a tent home in a refugee camp is a "privilege," one that is under threat

because of illegal policies of collective punishment, goes unquestioned. Abigail does not question why Ayat's family lives in a camp (nor, it seems, does she expect that the home of an Israeli citizen whose family member commits murder should be demolished). However, Um Samir's home demolition and curfew are framed as punishments which she has brought unto herself and thus made to seem perfectly logical. This resultant-violence logic is perfectly captured in the old and commonly quoted phrase, spoken by Golda Meir: "it will be harder for us to forgive them [Palestinians] for *having forced us to kill their sons*" (my emphasis).<sup>69</sup> These naturalized dynamics are part of the Orientalist discursive environment wherein colonial systems of unequal access to mobility and resources go unquestioned. The abusive relationship under which "your father/husband hits you because you provoke him" continues to colour the logic which undergirds these dialogues. These discourses of paternalistic overseers and caretakers are exacerbated by other overlapping truth regimes including exclusionary and "authoritative" white feminism (Lâm).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Golda Meir made this statement at a press conference in London in 1969 (Meir 242).

<sup>70</sup> "White" feminisms often take a similar stance invoking the fault of Palestinian women for being occupied because they are not "feminist enough." This latter point will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter (Chapter Three).

### **Orientalist Feminism and “White Feminist Authority”**

You will recall from the introduction that there exists a deep-rooted history of “authoritative” and exclusionary feminisms stemming out of Europe and North America and which was extended through colonial and anthropological practices, as well as well-intentioned international feminist movements, beginning over a century ago. The lessons that were intended to support the move towards third-wave feminism (the differentiation of voices) have, not yet, been realized. Difference continues to be obscured and at worst, understood to be an indication of a lack of civility and enlightenedness. White women, as a result, continue to take on a kind of “white feminist authority” around concepts of womanhood, liberation, peace and motherhood. While Abigail is not a self-described feminist she subscribes to the categories of motherhood as a kind of unifying politics around womanhood and seeks to impose such politics on Um Samir, mimicking the “white feminist authority” Lâm describes in her story about getting to the subway.

Abigail “occup[ies] the structural positio[n] of whiteness in the racial hierarchy of the Middle East” (Goldberg 33), and uses this imagined “authority” to insist on particular points of entry for dialogue (shared womanhood and motherhood) while ignoring the differences between herself and Um Samir. Her ability to impose these discursive points of entry with such aggression is constitutive of her position in the Orientalist logic as teacher. Abigail insists on the existence and primary importance of a notion of “common womanhood” quite

explicitly: “I think that this thing is between me and you as a mother. Me as a mother and you as a mother.” While Um Samir shows some subscription to value in the shared experience of motherhood, saying “I feel you. You’ve sacrificed as I’ve sacrificed,” she relentlessly insists on talking about the *differences* between their motherhoods and their womanhoods: “But you are not living under an occupation. You are the occupier.” Abigail ignores Um Samir’s differentiating statements and re-directs the conversation by attempting, again, to interpellate Um Samir back into their similitude as mothers. When Um Samir continually refuses this simple and homogenized identification with motherhood, Abigail attempts to make her feel like she has transgressed an assumed “shared” cultural code when she points her finger and says, “I don’t think that you knew about your daughter. I don’t think that you knew your daughter at all.” Um Samir resists Abigail’s shaming about her motherhood by *complicating* motherhood: “I did not know about my daughter. Nobody knows their daughters.” Yet Abigail insists, “I knew my daughter very well. My daughter never never never gonna kill someone for nothing.” Um Samir then acquiesces to this imposed ideal (maybe with some internalization of this shaming process) and begins to explain her “flaws” by hearkening to the *differences* between their children’s daughter-hoods, “That’s because your daughter is happy. She’s not under occupation.” Abigail yells, “NO NO NO!” but Um Samir continues with a pointing finger, “Because you’re not

living under occupation-under oppression under the crimes of occupation. You are talking from a position of comfort. We talk from a position of hardship.”<sup>71</sup>

The framing of Abigail’s mothering as superior to Um Samir’s is compounded by her sitting in a living room while Um Samir sits in a satellite studio. Such a disparity in settings not only manifests the disparity in comfort between the lives of the two women, but it also reinforces the presumed superiority of Abigail’s motherhood, where the living room reinforces that she is the hub of domestic life. Abigail, at the centre of her home, knows what goes on, including in her daughter’s life, because she rules the home. Um Samir’s setting, displaced a variety of times and even now this time from her home in a refugee camp, is attributed to her inability to mother instead of her disparities in privilege. Abigail’s living room (filled with her own furniture, couch, and familiar things and distinct from the coldness of the studio in which Um Samir sits) signifies comfort, luxury even, and protection from the violences and injustices of occupation; this makes her a good mother. Such differences in settings are rationalized in this way through a certain “regime of truth” that allows Abigail to call all the shots and insist on the existence and importance of a notion of universal motherhood. Such “authorities” in motherhood have histories in the dynamics of empire where “ideal” motherhoods are often tied to the national

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<sup>71</sup> I do not wish this quotation to be taken up as though there is an easy logic to blaming the occupation for the killing of Rachel. Instead I believe Um Samir is arguing that her daughter having “gone mad” was produced by the occupation. She notes clearly that she did not know what her daughter was doing and that “no one” would allow their daughter to do such a thing.

project.<sup>72</sup> The nation needs good mothers to bring up good citizens. Since Um Samir is not matching up to Abigail's image of motherhood, she's also deficient for not producing good citizens. In this case, peace cannot be found in the region because of Um Samir's retarded development as a mother.<sup>73</sup>

When this line of interpellation into ideal motherhood through shaming does not achieve the admission of "failure" from Um Samir that she seeks, Abigail persists in questioning Um Samir: "Do you think about my daughter sometimes? Do you see her sometimes in your dreams the way I see your daughter?" Abigail takes on a kind of macro-motherhood, the mother of all the girls, insofar as she thinks about not only her daughter but Um Samir's daughter, Ayat, as well. Um Samir responds, "A lot. A lot." Um Samir, again, acknowledges the value in an over-arching maternal caring for both of the daughters, but then complicates her identity as a mother with her other experiences as a colonized and racialized woman: Um Samir says that she thinks about Rachel too but not only as a mother; she thinks about her "because she's a victim and I'm a victim." Every time Abigail tries to create a kind of co-optive

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<sup>72</sup> In *Exalted Subjects* (2007) Sunera Thobani argues that, in the Canadian case, the Canadian nation-state has produced non-white women as "failed" mothers, as a sign of their suspicious citizenship. Moreover, the whole regime of social services works to enforce the notion of failed mothers. The critique of racialized women's motherhood's works in tandem with colonial logics that rationalize their oppression.

<sup>73</sup> This insistence on motherhood is a sub-category of the Western focus on womanhood in this case. This is particularly true, as Abu Samir's parenthood as the father of Ayat is not valued in and of itself (particularly as he is literally exiled from the dialogue). Therefore "good" motherhood becomes a subcategory of unitary womanhood.



unity between herself and Um Samir by calling attention to both of their losses or by insisting on their sameness as mothers, Um Samir agrees to some extent but continually maintains their differences.

Abigail's discursive impositions are supported by her access "to authority and resources" which emerge from her "personal environment" emanating from the "larger topography of empire, past and present" (Lâm 873). When, at one point during the dialogue, Abu Samir interjects, "We are victims of the occupation. You and I are victims of this occupation," the audience is taken into Abigail's living room where she is watching him speak but his voice becomes inaudible even while he continues to speak. The audience is subsequently made only to hear Abigail complaining to the crew, "why is the father there? I don't want to hear him—I don't understand." The film crew adheres to Abigail's desires and consequently zooms Abu Samir out of Abigail's television screen to focus only on Um Samir, thereby cutting out Abu Samir from the image and the conversation that the audience sees. After this extraction of Abu Samir, Abigail tries to interpellate Um Samir into a shared basis in womanhood again, insisting on an intimate similitude between them: "Um Ayat, I want to talk to you as a mother and I want you to listen to me mother to a mother."<sup>74</sup> While Um Samir at

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<sup>74</sup> The film notes that Abu Samir accompanies Um Samir because of custom; however, Palestinian women travel on their own throughout the West Bank regularly. Whether or not she is being "forced" to take Abu Samir with her is unclear. Nonetheless she may be taking him, voluntarily, as a support system, as she is being asked to engage in an endeavour which makes her quite vulnerable. Moreover Um Samir may have said that Abu Samir has to accompany her

various points in the dialogue resists this assumption of equivalence between herself, Abigail creates a kind of contingent prerequisite for Um Samir's re-entry into dialogue, asking her to speak only as a "mother to a mother," while at various points asking her not to speak about "politics." She assumes the authority to do so.

Since peace cannot be found because of Um Samir's inability to assimilate to Abigail's notion of ideal motherhood, she is framed as simply culturally backward and in need of cultural learning. There is a temporal element to this learning that is characteristic of a historically colonial eastward "civilizing process" which also rationalizes eastward teachings of womanhood. The language of bringing development, capitalism and political modernity (state apparatuses of citizenship, women's rights, equality etc.) from Europe to the third world has often relegated histories of knowledge and contemplation from non-Western countries into the ashes of history, while European history (as far back as from the ancient Greeks) seems always present. The modernist (and European colonialist) notion of spreading development from the West to the East posits "historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West" (Chakrabarty 7). For Europeans, "Enlightenment humanism" and concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the

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according to cultural custom as a kind of "sly civility" (Bhabha "Sly Civility") strategy in order not to be alone. All of this in mind, it is also possible that Um Samir was not permitted to go alone by her husband.

individual, democracy, social justice, and scientific rationality were of European lineage only. These modernist concepts defined Europe, and Europe “preached” (Chakrabarty 4) them to its colonies all the while denying them these concepts in practice. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that while John Stuart Mill’s famous modernist texts proclaim “self-rule as the highest form of government” Mill writes against “giving Indians or Africans self rule” because, according to him, “Indians or Africans were *not yet* civilized enough to rule themselves” (Chakrabarty 8). These “rude” nations would be “consigned [...] to an imaginary waiting room of history” (Chakrabarty 8). They were in a *later* history...always forthcoming subjects.<sup>75</sup>

Correspondingly, Abigail notes a difference between ‘her’ people, her daughter, and the Palestinian community, or Ayat: “You know my daughter, the roots of my daughter...even if I forced her to kill, she’s not gonna kill. If I tell with a knife to go and kill Arab people, she’s not gonna do it because she know that killing it’s wrong.” She goes on to say that “I’m sure that Ayat was a victim. A victim!” A victim, we later learn, of irresponsible parenting or what Abigail calls a “suicide culture” (her victimhood in occupation is unmentioned). Abigail insists on an inherent difference (stemming from racial and civilizational identities) between her and Um Samir: “You have a lot of hate toward us. A lot. From the past. It’s not from the last *intifada*, it’s not from ‘67 it’s not from ‘48.

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<sup>75</sup> Such concepts of not-yet civilized racialized or colonized people will be explored through a discussion of “colonial mimicry” in Chapter Five.

It's the hate that you felt towards us it's from a long time! Ok?" Hatred is somehow inherent in Um Samir (and Ayat) because they are Palestinian, and this is evidence of their primitivism and need for civilization, rendering Abigail's ostensible goal for the dialogue (to teach the *other* how to be a non-hateful civilized mother) impossible.<sup>76</sup> The purported hatred is ahistorical and non-contextual. It just "is."

Such a statement is contradictory to various Israeli historians' documentations of Arab and Jewish peaceful co-habitation in Palestine (Rejwan 21-23). Um Samir responds to Abigail's Orientalist stereotypes by contextualizing Palestinian protests to Israel:

My dear, how would I love you when you have stolen my land and my country? How would I love you? Give me back my rights and I won't mind if you live in my home! I want to explain one more thing-when there is occupation there is resistance!

This detailing of contextual difference to contest the notion of an essentialist cultural difference goes unheard, however, as Abigail concludes that she is "disappointed from you [Um Samir], because all of your messages you're sending signs of wars and hate." She ends the conversation by saying, "in your words I saw a lot of hate." While the Palestinian tries to explain the context of her reality, her words are inserted into the narrative of the hopeless and angry Arab hateful and excess.

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<sup>76</sup> I will reflect more on the paradoxical ways racial logics operate to both invest in the civilizing process and confirm the static and inherent backwardness of its receivers or students in Chapter Five through a discussion of Bhabha's "colonial mimicry," as well as Lorde's and El Saadawi's feminist theory.

Said argues that when the Arab speaks it is excess:

if the Arab occupies space enough for attention, it is as a negative value. He [sic] is seen as the disrupter of Israel's and the West's existence, or in another view of the same thing, as a surmountable obstacle to Israel's creation of 1948. Insofar as this Arab has any history, it is part of the history given him (or taken from him: the difference is slight) by the Orientalist tradition, and later, the Zionist tradition. Palestine was seen—by Lamartine and the early Zionists—as an empty desert waiting to burst into bloom; such inhabitants as it had were supposed to be inconsequential nomads possessing no real claim on the land and therefore no cultural or national reality. (286)

Such a sense that the Palestinian is occupying a “negative value” can be seen in Abigail's taunting of Um Samir: “You don't do nothing to solve the problem. You just complain. You just cry all the time like a baby. To solve the problem you have to start from yourself. To start from you.”

At various points in the film Abigail calls up her sense of cultural and racial authority, exclaiming “you should not think like this!” This imperative marks the other's discursive input as “wrong” and renders her a “negative value” and at best, a “child or miscreant, but certainly not political co-worker, let alone sister” (Lâm 873). The framing of disagreement between the two women as a cultural distance/difference (with Um Samir's represented as “a suicide culture” in *To Die*) ignores differences of material, economic and political power. Instead,

the East is extracted from dialogue until the “cultural” gap between civilizations is bridged, and that ultimately proves, at least in this film, to be impossible.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> This project is expected to fail due to the “incorrigibility of Orientals” and their untrustworthiness (Said 321). I will elaborate more on the expected failures of the process of “civilizing” the East in Chapter Five.

**Chapter Three: Stubborn Legacies of Orientalism in Left Feminist Academia: Analyzing Abdo and Lentin’s Self-Declared Critical, Anti-Racist Academic Feminist Dialogue**

In the previous chapter I discuss the ways in which the “top-down approach,” bolstered by an Orientalist discursive environment, is manifested in a dialogue between a Palestinian and Israeli woman in the film *To Die in Jerusalem*. In this chapter I examine the ways in which explicitly self-declared critical “anti-racist” feminists, seeking to rectify the injuries of universalizing feminisms, continue to reproduce dynamics of the “top-down” approach of Orientalist feminism, albeit in more subtle forms, by prioritizing and privileging Western theory as a central reference point. *Other(ed)* theorizations are expected to speak within the terms set out by “authoritative” Western theory and sometimes appear to be assessed for soundness through the principles of (canonical and often “white”) Western texts (e.g. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* in this case). This dialogue composes the introductory chapter to *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation* and it is composed of a set of email messages between Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin (the editors of the book), a Palestinian feminist academic and an Israeli feminist academic respectively.<sup>78</sup> While it can be easy to dismiss the

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<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that both of these women live outside of the region currently. Abdo lives in Canada and Lentin lives in Ireland, but both were born, raised and partly-educated in Israel and Palestine. Lentin continues to consider the region as a kind of “home” (Wingo). Abdo resides in Israel and Palestine for long periods of time regularly. Both also have immediate families in Israel and Palestine and according to Wingo, the two women met in Israel and Palestine in 2000 at Beit

failure of *To Die's* “everyday” dialogue as an instance of utter ignorance—wherein Abigail’s awareness of the occupation and the power relations between the women is acutely problematic—academic feminists often imagine themselves or are imagined to be engaged in more critical dialogues than those of the “everyday.” This chapter’s intention, subsequently, is to reveal the pervasiveness of the colonial Orientalist logic as it even inflects one of the most critical Israeli-Palestinian academic-activist dialogues that exist in the public sphere. I hope, through this dialogue analysis, to open up more general questions about the functions of “Left” politics in the university.

The participants both declare an awareness of the “power differential” between Israelis and Palestinians (1) in dialogue and the authors call themselves “anti-racist” and “anti-classist” (3,5). Indeed, preceding the dialogue is a

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Berl College. This dialogue seems to have some distance from the immediacy of the occupation, as it arguably occurs in the diaspora. It is not my intention, however, to provide a thorough discussion of diaspora politics with regards to Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, for that would be the matter of another project. Abdo and Lentin’s dialogue is occurring in an ambiguously diasporic space because both women continue to have intimate attachments to Israel and Palestine as a “home” even as they live in the West. Because the processes of colonialism and displacement are ongoing in Israel and Palestine, it is difficult to establish their diasporic status as chosen or willful. Lentin’s disapproval of Israel’s colonial policies make it difficult for her to live in Israel even while, it is important to acknowledge, she is privileged in the region. Many Israeli activists like Ilan Pappé and Amira Hass are exiled or feel uncomfortable living in Israel and actively choose to live elsewhere. Amira Hass has chosen to live in the West Bank, for example. Lentin and Abdo’s statuses and their families’ citizenship statuses as well as their levels of access and mobility in Israel and Palestine continue to be shaped by the present politics of Israeli colonialism. As such their displacement is ambiguously diasporic and it would be imprudent to identify them simply as “Western” academics.



collaboratively written piece by Abdo and Lentin which indicates their awareness of power asymmetries:

writing dialogically as a process of sharing not only our thoughts, but also our power, in a situation in which the power differential (between Israelis and Palestinians) is an obvious truism, has been our ongoing work as we toil to put this book together (1).

Despite this declared criticality and attention to power differentials, my analysis of the dialogue reveals the ways an omnipresent Orientalist discursive environment undergirds “critical” dialogue, manifesting the continuing challenge of working across power differentials in feminist academic and activist work. Such challenges continue to be endemic to feminist academic dialogues attempting to operate across power asymmetries as I outline later, drawing on the writings of Ien Ang, Sunera Thobani, Nawal El Saadawi, Gayatri Spivak, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Chandra Mohanty, Fatima Mernissi, Mallica Vajrathon, and Patricia Monture. These theorists argue that the theorizations of racialized women continue to be marginalized by the “listeners” in Western universities. Before I connect Lentin and Abdo’s dialogue with such theorizations, I will outline the dialogue’s contents and the dynamics of the top-down approach.

It is important to note that there is a quantitatively healthy representation of both Abdo and Lentin’s writings. Moreover, Abdo’s contributions can be well-heard by readers of the book (depending on their own critical positions). Nevertheless, I highlight the ways in which the trajectory of the dialogue is shaped by Lentin’s invocation of “authority” (through the prioritization of

Western theory via Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*), even when Abdo complicates its seamless applicability to the Palestinian context and attempts to diversify the meaning of nationalism. Western theorization and definitions come to occupy the status of universal and authoritative “norm” against which Abdo must try to fit her own experiences, and eventually speak against, sometimes defensively trying to convince Lentin of the “legitimacy” of her own theorizations. There subtly emerges a “white feminist authority” in this exchange as Abdo appears pressured to allude to her knowledge—the requisite reading—of Western theory (about critiques of nationalism as a masculinist discourse, in this case) to, perhaps, become “convincing,” as a critical academic, to Lentin (and arguably other feminist-academics subscribing to the authority of “white” or Western theory).

It is also important to note that both Lentin and Abdo remain incredibly active in feminist and anti-racist as well as anti-Zionist struggles. Lentin's most recent edited book *Thinking Palestine* includes powerful, critical anti-colonial pieces. Therefore, my critique of the dialogue in *Women and the Politics* is, necessarily, an isolated study of one of the authors' pieces. Lentin and Abdo's politics are varied and complicated and necessarily dynamic—they do not remain static from year to year or from book to book, however this dialogue does serve as a representative case study of “dialogue.” Indeed, the critique of the Abdo-Lentin dialogue is necessary because as a dialogue in a prominent text on Israeli and Palestinian women, it has the effect of reproducing itself and influencing future

dialogues between Israeli and Palestinian women. Therefore, a deep reflection on the discursive constraints of the dialogue is important so that imminent dialogues can take this critique into account. Despite the brilliance and progressivism of Abdo and Lentin's works, it remains important to scrutinize the ways Orientalism shapes and constrains the nature of their dialogue as well as the ways they *both* partake in dialogue.

### **The Dialogue**

*Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation* is composed of alternating chapters of personal accounts written by Israeli and Palestinian women. Abdo begins the dialogue in the introduction to *Women* by indicating her hesitation in “taking part in such a project” which seems to be “not very different from other forms of political ‘negotiations’” such as “high or hard-level politics” (e.g. the Oslo meetings). Making a reference to the “feeble exercise” of the Jerusalem Link's’ “talks” she argues that the failure of these forms of dialogue is that “the talkers cannot stand on par with each other and are not negotiating from a basic common understanding of the identity and nature of the oppressor and the identity and nature of the oppressed” (*Women and the Politics* 2). While Abdo indicates that “no one can dialogue with the state, especially if it is as oppressive and complex as the Zionist state,” she says she “cannot deny the presence—albeit rare and marginalised—of Israeli and Palestinian feminist activism, which is

dialogical in nature and largely removed from power constraints” (*Women and the Politics* 2). Having dialogued with other “anti-Zionist” and “anti-racist” scholars, Abdo says this particular dialogue with Lentin concerns her as she is “claiming responsibility over Israeli contributions whose Shoah experience might cast Zionism in the very meaning that might be antithetical to that experienced by my people” (3). But she explains she wanted to include these contributions because “there are many feminisms and feminism itself is an on-going process” (3). Abdo explains, “I myself have gone through different phases of development in my feminism, from nationalist feminism to a feminism critical of all nationalisms, including my own” (*Women and the Politics* 3). Abdo ends her first entry asking Lentin her opinion about “starting the introduction with the title ‘Unlearning Zionism’” (3).

Lentin does not respond to this question and responds by anchoring the presumed commonality of women. She explains that her idea of editing a book about “the experiences of dislocation of Palestinian and Israeli women” because of her interest in “how diasporic and occupation experiences impact women as gendered beings” (4):

I had just read the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) and I was attracted by his idea of an ‘inter-national’ space for counter-narratives (where the hyphen is not only the space for commonalities but for subversion as well) and felt that *our* voices, the *voices of anti-nationalist feminists* who have been affected by diasporicity of any kind, is one form of counter-narrative to the masculinist, nationalist narration of nation, and in particular to the Zionist narration of a nation, which, in the course of inventing itself (see

Anderson, 1983), constructed a series of ‘nativist’ foundational narratives. (*Women and the Politics* 4, emphasis mine)

Despite Lentin’s preamble about the need to differentiate between the women’s experiences of power, Israeli and Palestinian women’s “diasporicity” seems to be likened in such a way that that their “gendered” oppressions, which Lentin positions as oppositional to the “masculinist, nationalist narration of the nation,” supercede other constellations of oppression.

Lentin goes on to re-critique the modern forms that Zionism has taken in Israel and Palestine. She asserts: “realising that Zionism—and this is not easy to write, even though I am an avowed anti-Zionist Israeli—is *racist* means that in the dialogue between us, and between our contributors through their various essays, there can be no real equality” (5). Lentin goes on, “despite the fact that some of the contributors, myself included, have a recent family history as Jewish refugees in Nazi-occupied Europe, in Israel-Palestine we belong to the occupiers and you to the occupied” (5). Her awareness of unequal power relations exists but as the dialogue progresses, it appears Lentin tries to contain these differences within a narrowly defined anti-nationalist feminism. Differences between the women’s definitions of anti-nationalist feminism—which I outline later—are not adequately heard by Lentin. Lentin ends her entry by stating that “Zionism and the existence of the state of Israel as a Jewish state have different meanings for you and for me” (5) and urges that “you and I must not fall into positions of moral superiority (of the occupied) or guilt (of the occupiers) but address them as

honestly as we can” (5). This plea for “honesty,” particularly in relation to Lentin’s push for anti-nationalist politics—which Abdo seems to subscribe to so far indicating that she has become critical of “all nationalisms, including my own” (3)—seems itself to act from an intellectually and ethically “superior” position.

Preemptively asking Abdo to be “honest” and situating that honesty as competing with her position as an occupied person makes assumptions that Abdo may not be quite critical or neutral enough. While Lentin asks the same of herself (not to speak from a position of guilt) the request, which comes from the occupier, is vague in meaning and seems infused with authority over criticality. In other words, Lentin takes on the position, with authority, of ensuring a “neutral” conversation. What this neutrality or “honesty” means, as we will see, is as biased and non-neutral as any such morally superior position Lentin preemptively fears Abdo will take up. Because it is impossible for people to speak “neutrally” this request from Lentin to Abdo to speak with criticality seems to—in keeping with other Palestinian women’s experiences in dialogue—ask the Palestinian woman to prove her “intellect” (read: anti-nationalist feminist politics) which is seen as sometimes competing with her experiences as an occupied person. Absolute rejection of nationalism—in any form--will come to signify “honesty” and criticality for Lentin, whilst Abdo’s *othered* theorizations about nationalism are narrated by Lentin as biased, non-critical theorizations—stemming from a position of misguidedly “morally superior” victimhood. When Abdo insists on the differences between her theorizations of nationalism and Lentin’s, stemming from

their variant experiences as members of colonized and colonizer populations, Lentin insists on their “gendered” experiences as their foremost mode of identification, using Jewish experiences of the Holocaust to make almost identical their “victim” status, despite contemporary political circumstances.

Abdo responds by saying “to be honest, due to my experience as a Palestinian in the diaspora and a citizen of Israel, I admit that my feminism, while anti-nationalistic, has not been anti-national” (6). She explains, “Being anti-national would have rendered me indifferent towards the Zionist or the Israeli racist and nationalistic exclusion and oppression of the community of women and men I belong to” (6). She goes on to describe the “exclusivist and exclusionary” Zionist movement’s impact on Palestinian people through the 1948 Nakbe and ongoing occupation. Abdo explains that growing up as a second class Israeli citizen, being denied the same rights as her Israeli counterparts and having her Palestinian cultural identity threatened on a daily basis in Israel (and in Palestine) has exacerbated her interest in Palestinian nationalism:

The overwhelming obsession of the Jewish state with my national identity, expressed, among other ways, in the confiscation of land, the Judaisation of Palestinian land [...], the imprisonment and silencing of critical voices, the distortion of our history in text books at schools, the denial to Palestinian citizens of equal access to labour, education, political and other areas of the public sphere, had the impact of subsuming my feminist identity under my national one. (7)

She describes being forbidden to draw the Palestinian flag in school, to perform or read the poetry of Israeli-Palestinians like Mahmoud Darwish, of being unable to

take certain courses in university which were reserved for those who serve in the IDF/IOF army (Palestinians are not allowed to serve in the IDF/IOF) and the disparity in access to electricity and water between her and her Jewish schoolmates (7).

Abdo clearly delineates her distinctions between Palestinian and Zionist nationalisms, challenging Lentin's easy equation of their ills. Abdo writes:

Palestinian nationalism, in contradistinction to Zionism, is a liberatory movement with the potential for opening up a space for social justice and gender issues. Zionism, on the other hand, is the force which suppresses and subjugates the very existence and identity of the Palestinians. (8)

She also complicates her identification with Lentin simply as a "woman" by revealing other constellations of her "national" experience within the state of which she is a citizen:

For most of my life as a Palestinian (with Israeli citizenship), I was always reminded that I have no place or space in my own homeland, reminded I was inferior to the non-Palestinian (Jewish) citizens of Israel, all of which was done not in the name of a straightforward patriarchal rule against women, but rather against 'me' as a member of an 'inferior', 'backward', 'subjugated', and 'alien' nation. (7)

After outlining more of the ways in which her racialized experiences in Israel created a political consciousness for her, she asks:

How could the Algerian national movement fighting French colonialism, the South African national movement fighting apartheid, and the Palestinian movement fighting Zionism be compared, let alone equated with Zionism? (8).



After outlining her experiences of discrimination as an Arab Palestinian in Israel society Abdo reasserts: “During the mid- and late 1970s in Israel, much of my energy as an activist, whether at the university or outside, was spent reaffirming my identity as a Palestinian” (80). Abdo’s experiences, she explains, have “created favourable conditions for prioritising nationalism over gender issues, for making me more a ‘Palestinian’ than a gendered being, a woman” (9).

After Abdo’s long rumination on the role of nationalism in her activist and academic work, Lentin responds:

Nationalism...big sigh...what can I say? If we agree that nations are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983), something which we may not agree on of course, then we must ask whether the recent resurgence of Palestinian nationalism has been imagined mostly (merely?) in response to (Zionist) oppression? Has it been imagined in relation to oppression in the same way that Zionist nationalism might have been imagined in response to anti-Semitic oppression in nineteenth century Europe?” (9)

Here Lentin conflates liberatory Zionist nationalism with modern settler-colonialist Zionist nationalism, making the quick move to imply that all liberatory nationalisms will eventually turn into settler-colonialist nationalisms. In this way, Lentin portrays Palestinian liberatory movements as still developing immature forms of a settler-colonial nationalism, as the East—in keeping with Orientalist thought—struggles to keep up with and unsuccessfully imitate the West. The West—that is, Israel’s formation with the apparatus of the UN as well as military and political support from imperial Britain and the United States—becomes a paradigmatic exemplar of the natural development of “liberation” movements, leaving little room for *different political trajectories*.

She continues insisting on “sameness” stating: “I see more similarities than differences between Israeli (Jewish) and Palestinian nationalisms, both allegedly aiming at constructing autonomy, independence, [and] self-determination” (9). Lentin continues evoking Anderson’s Western theories on nationalism, saying “I cannot but argue that nationalism is conceived by and for men (Anderson’s ‘horizontal brotherhood’), without taking into account either the experiences of women, or their active participation in national liberation struggles” (9). Lentin provides a quotation from an Arab woman who wrote about a backlash against Palestinian women during the first intifada which Lentin parallels to the infamous case, in Western texts, of “Algeria” wherein women were “sent back home” after participating in the “independence struggle against the French” (9). Lentin importantly wonders, “to what extent Palestinian feminists [...] can incorporate the social (gender) agenda into the national agenda” (10). After asking this important question, Lentin reverts back to imposing symmetry on Palestinian and Israeli nationalisms.

Lentin references important feminist texts, for the Western world, written by racialized women who critique the universalizing tendencies of “white feminism”—showing her knowledge of such critiques—but she immediately reverts back to equalizing her Zionist nationalism with the Palestinian liberatory nationalism Abdo speaks of:

Aware of the challenges issued by majority world and black feminists (e.g. Ahmed, 1982; Mohanty 1991) to Western feminism in relation to being

discursively constructed as a unitary ‘woman’ and to Western feminism’s prioritizing gender as the uppermost category of analysis, I agree with you that gender is not always the main factor in our intersection of subordinations. Our identities are gendered, raced, ethnicised, but, as you argue so forcefully, also nationalized. I take on board your nationalism, but, where is mine? Do I still have a nationality? A nationalism? (10)

Some time passed after this entry as the Al Aqsa intifada roared on. Abdo and Lentin decided to continue dialoguing, and Abdo begins the next round by responding to Lentin’s questions about the tensions between nationalism and Lentin’s sense of belonging to “m(other)-land” (10) Israel, as Lentin puts it. Thus far Lentin has assumed that Abdo supports state nationalism and Abdo begins to re-theorize or further theorize nationalism by indicating the importance of separating nationalism of the people and state-nationalism. She argues that it is important to separate Judaism from Zionism and the people from the state so that people can “see Zionism as an ideology of settler-colonial power, and thus necessarily oppressive, exclusionary, and racist” (13). Abdo promotes the importance of separating the Jewish identity from the Jewish state. She insists “anti-Zionism must not be equated with anti-Semitism” (14) and laments the challenges in getting Israeli and Jewish feminist activists to see this distinction.

In the next two installments, Lentin states that she shares Abdo’s frustration with the difficulty of “com[ing] out as anti-Zionist” (15) in Jewish feminist circles (16-18). Lentin describes visiting Israel for her mother’s birthday during Israel’s Independence Day festivities and the “enforced public silence when the sirens sounded” which Lentin feared to break (19). She explains that she

was made aware of how difficult it is to live as a Palestinian under occupation or as a second-class citizen of Israel. Lentin describes the “fireworks and military-style televised independence celebrations” and goes on to explain there were also several car bombs as well as “resultant” house demolitions and air raids (19). She explains, “I was again aware of the delicate balance between sanctimonious approval of anything Palestinian and the possibility of retaining a critical stance—which means, among other things, being able to critique both Israeli *and* Palestinian nationalisms—and a feminist anti-nationalist stance” (19). Evidently, Lentin continues to insist on the foundation of a “feminist anti-nationalist stance” as the common-ground for Abdo and Lentin. Lentin makes striking assumptions about Abdo’s anti-nationalist politics and there seems to be a kind of pressure for Abdo to make an outrightly universal anti-nationalist comment. Thus far in the dialogue Abdo has attempted to distinguish between the Palestinian and Israeli nationalisms, but she does so quite vaguely without distinguishing between different kinds of Palestinian nationalisms. What happens next is perturbing as Abdo finally begins to clearly define what liberation nationalist politics mean to her (dissecting state nationalism from “street” nationalism) while Lentin continues to read Abdo’s politics into Western theoretical models. Lentin anchors Andersonian Western theory about nationalism as paradigmatic, leaving little room for Abdo’s *other(ed)* and more complex theorizations which come from a markedly different identity-position than Lentin’s.

Abdo commences the last installment of the dialogue by reflecting on “issues that seem to be somewhat troubling for” Lentin (22). The dialogue becomes one in which Abdo is responding to Lentin’s assumptions and questions about Abdo’s politics. This becomes particularly clear as Abdo spends the last installment of her dialogue as a kind of “defense” of her politics. The pressure on Abdo is also evident in the ways Abdo evokes Western theory when trying to articulate her own differentiated theory.

Abdo unpacks Lentin’s assumptions about her feminist nationalism: “about the position you were ‘afraid’ was going to make me angry, namely, your criticism of the PA, let me begin by saying that my critical position on the PA is widely publicized” (24). Abdo cites an article written in 1999 in which she “presents a clear challenge to the PA” critiquing the PA for “lack of transparency, professionalism, and accountability in its governance” (24). The article, according to Abdo, reminds the Authority:

of the general disappointment it has generated among many sections of Palestinian civil society, especially women, objecting to the patronage system it employs in appointing high officials and holding the Authority responsible for the deterioration in women’s position, among other things. (24)

Her article, she continues, critiqued the PA’s total economic and political dependence on Israel and the United States, arguing that such dependence would “only lead to other forms of subjugation, including the realms of the social, gender, and cultural” and also to the Authority’s economic mismanagement (24).

Indeed, Abdo reminds Lentin that *Miftah* is run by Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian state-affiliated feminist advocating for a two-state solution and women's rights, who has been active in criticizing the PA and organizing Palestinians to mobilize against such injustices. Abdo further argues that several Palestinian feminists (I would add, including men) have launched "clear criticisms of the semi- or quasi-state" (25). Abdo distinguishes between a "national liberation movement" and an "institutionalized nationalism or state-nationalism" (25). She explains that although she focuses her work on getting refugee women access to "education, jobs, public life, and a life without violence, domestic or otherwise" (25) and not on "issues of 'nationalism,'" Abdo supports the popular national movement. Abdo points out that her nationalism "is not in defence of the Authority; it is not in defence of Palestinian male patriarchy," it is an expression "of my support of the ongoing popular movement, which is using all means (stones, demonstrations, sit-ins, protests, petitions) to resist Israeli colonialism" and "Israeli military occupation" (25):

I strongly defend the struggle against Israeli settler colonialism, the anti-colonial movement against occupation and against the foreign invasions of their land, homes, and space. If my struggle with, support for, and almost total identification with what is happening in the streets of the Occupied Territories appears as nationalism, it is also because of the strength of 'feelings' and the almost 'real' emotions, as Benedict Anderson said, that are brought out by the loss of, and the fight for, cultural and material existence. (26)

As Lentin centers Anderson's work in the dialogue, Abdo articulates hers in relation to Anderson as well. Abdo has the double task of knowing and interacting

with the Western theory Lentin mentions, while also deconstructing it and situating her own resistance politics in relation to it. She insists that despite having read these texts, there is a colonial situation which prioritizes her identity as an occupied person: “the greed and constant expansionism of the more powerful oppressor, Israel, has overshadowed Palestinian internal frustration and contradictions; hence their *overwhelming focus on the external enemy*” (27, my emphasis).

Lentin’s focus on Western theoretical models and her expectation that Palestinian experiences are to line up with Anderson’s “authoritative” text which has been taken up quite enthusiastically by many prominent feminists like Cynthia Enloe and Nira Yuval-Davis parallels some of the systemic problems with Western feminist movements in general. As the dialogue comes to an end, Abdo begins to yield to some of the pressures brought to bear by Western feminist discourse (as well as by her vulnerable status as a second class citizen in Israel, not to mention Israel tactics of surveillance and intimidation). She says that for the last six years or so her “critical feminist identity is more important than [her] national one” (25). By the end of the chapter, Abdo hesitantly accepts the prioritization of feminist identities over national ones (which is contrary to the rest of the introduction) and in a seemingly explanatory tone she dispels Lentin’s questions about her feminist commitments:

It is for this reason I chose to concentrate my work with refugee women not on issues of ‘nationalism’, but rather on issues directly related to their

development [...]. This was also the reason for my heavy involvement in helping to establish a gender research unit, in training women—mainly refugees—in the methods of doing feminist research, and in doing, with them, field visits and interviews in the refugee camps. (25)

After outlining her purportedly “non-nationalist” feminist work in refugee camps, Abdo continues to show her discomfort with Lentin’s theoretical and discursive dogma and abruptly reclaims her nationalism:

This tone, I admit, is an expression of the spontaneous—albeit real—reaction I have developed since the Second Intifada. My ‘nationalism’ here is not in defence of the Authority; it is not in defence of the feeble, lame, and dependent entity; it is not in defence of the Palestinian male patriarchy, which continues to oppress my fellow sisters. My nationalism, rather, is an expression of my support of the ongoing popular movement as it struggles against Israeli military occupation. Deep inside, I realize the difference between Arafat’s regime and the people in the streets. I understand the difference between the involvement of the Authority and the involvement of many sectors of civil society. I also understand the spontaneity with which many children take up stones and throw them at Israeli soldiers in a gesture to rid themselves of the foreign enemy. (25)

Abdo ends on this note, trying to prove her feminist politics and simultaneously defend her nationalist ones, ultimately insisting that the two are inextricable.

There exists a pressure for Abdo in this dialogue: in order to critique oppressive Zionist nationalism in an international feminist dialogue, she must simultaneously illustrate her “feminist” politics (narrowly defined), critique the Palestinian state-leadership, and be very clear about the “popular” nature of her nationalism (25). Such are the negotiations she must make to become “audible” in the discursive environment. Abdo’s dialogue tactics are imbued with courage when she attempts to re-frame these parameters, but she is compelled to make certain concessions. The way Abdo speaks (in this dialogue) in constant relation



to how she is being perceived, working to dispel myths and assumptions, may not be a unilateral dynamic. Indeed, it is possible that Lentin feels a pressure to announce her rejection of Zionism at the beginning of each dialogue; dialogue is always relational. However, the implications and costs of particular assumptions (such as that of the Palestinian woman as a non-feminist state-nationalist) have much more dire consequences for her as they can work not only to exclude her from what appear to be feminist “peace” dialogues but they can also work, under a colonial logic, to legitimize her displacement and oppression, wherein the governed are *not yet ready* to govern themselves. For the Israeli who is perceived to be a Zionist there is much less risk for they do not *need* Palestinians to hear them to the same extent as the reverse is true. The difference in the need to “negotiate” between Israeli and Palestinian women will be elucidated in Chapters Four and Five.

### **“Difference,” Academic Dialogues and Feminism**

Because historically the Western university has been part of the historical processes of colonialism, there is a negotiation which must occur when a colonized person engages the knowledge system of the university. Spivak argues “Third world” intellectuals “have to position themselves strategically as intellectuals within the academy” as well as “within the Third World or indigenous world, and within the Western world in which many intellectuals

actually work” (qtd. in Smith, *Decolonizing* 71). Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that decolonizing theory and education

does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (Smith, *Decolonizing* 39)

However, the more difficult problem that anti-colonial feminists like Spivak, Smith and Ang come up against is the problem of “listening.” Spivak explains the problem for “Third World intellectuals remains the problem of being taken seriously” (qtd. in Smith, *Decolonizing* 71):

For me, the question “Who should speak?” Is less crucial than “Who will listen?”. “I will speak for myself as a Third World person” is an important position for political mobilisation today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism. (Spivak qtd. in Smith, *Decolonizing* 71)

Often “listening,” particularly in feminist academic work, is imagined to be the inclusion of “difference” which is “typically imagined by the feminist establishment through such benevolent terms as ‘recognition’, ‘understanding’ and ‘dialogue’” (Ang):

The problem with such terms is first of all that they reveal an overconfident faith in the power and possibility of open and honest communication to ‘overcome’ or ‘settle’ differences, of a power-free speech situation without interference by entrenched presumptions, sensitivities and pre-conceived ideas. It is a faith in our (limitless?) capacity not only to speak, but, more importantly, to listen and hear. (Ang)

I would add that such terms and their activities can continue to produce, rather than improve, the power inequities between the women who are speaking.

Concepts like recognition and understanding continue to situate a recognizer or

understander as someone for whom the dialogue will have to make some sense, situating the listener's knowledge as norm. Various critical scholars have questioned "the (white) feminist ability to listen in this regard" (Ang) such that a truly vibrant dialogue may occur and the *othered* may speak with some authority herself:

Is the reason we haven't heard from them before that they haven't spoken, or that we haven't listened (. . .) Are we really willing to hear anything and everything that they might have to say, or only what we don't find too disturbing? Are we prepared to hear what they say, even if it requires learning concepts or whole languages that we don't yet understand? (Spelman qtd. in Ang)

While Ang warns against Spelman's phrasing which evokes a problematic divide between 'us' and 'them' (i.e., 'other' women), while also centralizing the listener, Spelman's questions indicate the challenge of "difference" which, according to Ang, "cannot be 'dealt with' easily, and can certainly not just be 'overcome'" (Ang).

While feminists have critiqued earlier generations of feminist work which understood women as a unitary womanhood or sisterhood, racialized women have continued to attack this assumption because "it denied the impact of imperialisms, racism and local histories on women, who were different from white women who lived in First World nations" (Smith, *Decolonizing* 73). Smith conjures up the work of Trinh T. Minh-ha, reflecting on the writing of anthropologists in particular, even as we enter this new critical era of difference-within-feminism: "But once more *they* spoke. *They* decide who is 'racism-free or

anti-colonial’, and they seriously think they can go on formulating criteria for us...” (qtd. in Smith, *Decolonizing* 73). Even “difference” becomes a tool for appropriation and is highly regulated according to rules of “proper” criticality, as we see with Abdo and Lentin.

The difficulties of difference “cannot be resolved through communication, no matter how complex the dialogue” as the “very desire to resolve them in the first place could result in a premature glossing-over of the social irreducibility and inescapability of certain markers of difference and the way they affect women’s lives” (Ang). Drawing on Mohanty’s work, Ang argues that reducing difference to diversity, “is tantamount to a more sophisticated and complex form of assimilation” (Ang):

‘Difference seen as benign variation (diversity), for instance, rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism. On the other hand, difference defined as asymmetrical and incommensurate cultural spheres situated within hierarchies of domination and resistance cannot be accommodated within a discourse of “harmony in diversity”.’ (Mohanty qtd. in Ang)

Racialized feminists are accumulating a range of examples of the failures of these “new” dialogues.

One early and famous instance of tensions between Eastern and Western feminists occurred at the Wellesley Conference titled, “Women and Development” held in 1976 in Boston, Massachusetts. This conference spurred angry reactions from many racialized women attendees including participants like

Nawal El Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi and Mallica Vajrathon, who describe the conference as a:

Painful clash between on the one hand well-meaning American women academicians who believed themselves to be ahead of American men, and freed from colonial and imperialist limitations, and on the other hand overly optimistic Third World women who had believed that the impossible dialogue between people from developed and developing countries could be restored by women, between women, and for women. (El Saadawi et al 150)<sup>79</sup>

El Saadawi, Mernissi and Vajrathon explain that this gathering, which was described as international in scope and focused on “Women and Development,” included only a small contingent of “women from developing countries at the levels of organizing, panel convening and paper giving” (144). They explain that “women from developing countries had to listen to Westerners talking to them about their own cultures” and there was little time after the presentations for Third World women to correct the information or to discuss “incorrect [...] interpretations of their culture” (144). There was an insistent request by women living in the “Third world” for “more discussion time” and this was read by the organizers as “disruptive behaviour” (144): “It appeared after repeated clashes with the organizers that they expected us to sit quietly and listen respectfully to the papers, no matter what their context was, and certainly not to hurry the speech makers” (144). When women from “the global South,” as described by El Saadawi et. al, realized that they could not do much to change the structure and

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<sup>79</sup> El Saadawi indicates her disdain for the ideological connotations of the labels “developing” and “developed” later in the text but uses the terms to identify the ways some women are represented and perceived.

organization of the conference, they decided to concentrate on the issue of publishing the proceedings of the conference: “Hours of nightly meetings were spent in trying to have some say in the proceedings by restructuring the editorial committee, which was heavily if not totally American” (145). However, the editorial board was “not willing to give in on that issue either” (145) and the “strange, laborious arguments that went back and forth between organizers, the committee members of the editing board, and Third World participants was [...] degrading,” sometimes taking the form of “straightforward insults” (145). El Saadawi et al. describe the editorial board as ultimately “maternalistic and condescending” (148). One of the key organizers responded to the protesters, calling them “destructive” and claiming, “You disrupted all the panels in which you were not a member. You liked only the one in which you delivered your paper” (149). El Saadawi argues that in this response the “clash” is explained by “personality defects” of “unruly” individuals (149).

El Saadawi recalls a similar experience at the “World Conference” held in Mexico City in 1975 at which women from Europe and North America ascertained that the women’s international movement had failed when women began “to forward political claims” (146) that were interested in structural issues of economic, racial and political oppression. Women from Europe and North America suggested that “politics” were a “diversion from women’s issues, and a deliberate attempt by Third World women, who allegedly lack ‘feminist’ awareness, to minimize the women’s question by linking it to bigger political

issues” (146), namely, the effects of “development” and “modernization” on the degrading economic conditions of women. According to El Saadawi the absence of these political issues made the Third World women “realize that we were invited to attend a conference where mostly US ‘scholars’ were interpreting for us our conditions, our culture, our religion and our experiences” (146). Such an experience combined with the absence of papers on US women and their feminist struggle in the West replicated “the hardly healed colonial experience—where detached outsiders define your world for you” (146) and any the critique of Western patriarchies, or Western feminisms for that matter, are underrepresented.

Today the experience of racialized women in academia can be equally frustrating and can take the form of what El Saadawi, Mernissi and Vajrathon call “colonial dialogue” (149). Patricia Monture reflects on the university in North America and its shortcomings as an institution as it “is only willing to recognize a single model of knowledge and knowledge-sharing” (28). Arguing that one’s experience is a form of knowledge, Monture reflects on the difficulty of gaining credibility in the university through publishing in new international journals because they are considered “substandard” or according to Monture “not Western” (32). Racialized scholars have the added task of avoiding the entrenchment of colonial ideologies and “whiteness as the neutral and natural foundation of all knowledge” (31). At the same time racialized scholars are pressured not to talk about structural barriers such as anti-feminist, Eurocentric or homophobic editorial boards (31-32). In other words, racialized scholars are asked

to avoid “political” conversations. But what is determined to be political and apolitical? What is “honest” criticality? And more importantly, who gets to set the terms for these questions?

In the current moment, it has become vital to explore the *functions* of “critical” dialogues which are not yet *anti-racist*. Ang draws on Pettman’s work to argue that recognizing difference and

unequal power [...] while not giving up on community or solidarity or sister-hood’ [...] sounds all too deceptively easy, a formula of containment that wants to have it both ways, as if differences among women could unproblematically be turned into a ‘unity in diversity’ once they are ‘recognised’ properly.

Here status quo dialogues, which try to incorporate difference are described as a “containment.” Ang invokes examples of dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous women to ask whether the concept of “women” continues to be “surreptitiously smuggled back in here as the essential way in which the interlocutors are assumed to resemble each other?” (Ang). I will explore the notion of resemblance later in my discussion of “colonial mimicry” as a prerequisite for dialogue in Chapter Five. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I would like to consider the ways in which difference continues to be “contained” in critical feminist dialogues (i.e. through debates on academic freedom in the university, for example). In this particular case, dialogue is contained through the regulation of “authoritative” theoretical positions.



The following section contributes to anti-colonial feminist work. Perhaps through the critical analysis of hegemonic academic feminist discourse the following reflection on nationalism's varying role in women's lives can contribute, in a small way, to the much needed "internationalization of knowledge" (El Saadawi 152),<sup>80</sup> and the rejection of "Eurocentric discourses" (Razack et al 8) as a prerequisite for the development of an anti-colonial feminist movement.

### **Anti-Nationalism, Nationalism, Colonialism and Feminism: Narrow Definitions that "Contain" Difference**

Tensions over nationalism in feminist dialogue are ubiquitous. The critique of nationalism as a masculine construct has been an important one in Western academic feminism. Following Benedict Anderson's argument that the nation is "imagined as limited" across a "deep, horizontal [fraternal] comradeship" (Anderson 7), many feminist theorists have invalidated nationalism

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<sup>80</sup> El Saadawi prescribes the restructuring of international women's conferences. She encourages the presence of racialized women and women from "developing countries" in decision-making positions as organizers. She encourages Western feminists to contribute analyses about feminisms in their own countries and argues that publishing should stop being a safeguarded monopoly of developed countries. In other words "Third World" women should not be accepted into a conference based on their publishing record. She notes that translation of language is crucial and that there exists a donor-recipient dynamic in international women's conferences (in which the Western women are able to get money and ask racialized women to "perform" their worth to funders at the conference) (151-153).

as an exclusionary politics incompatible with feminism. Nira Yuval-Davis argues that “the whole social philosophy which was at the base of the rise of the notion of state citizenship was constructed in terms of the ‘Rights of Man,’ a social contract based on the ‘fraternity of men’ [...]” (217) For Yuval-Davis, “women were not simply late comers to citizenship rights”:

Their exclusion was part and parcel of the construction of the entitlement of men to democratic participation which conferred citizen status not upon individuals as such, but upon men in their capacity as members and representatives of a family (i.e., a group of non-citizens) (Vogel qtd. in Yuval-Davis 217).

Yuval-Davis explains that the link between the place of women in the nation (often as reproducers of populations and of culture) and their subjugation within that nation can be found in customary, religious and legal regulations (Yuval-Davis 220). Consequently, the nation can become culturally exclusionary of, for example, “bastard” children and interracial marriages (such as when Rabbi Kahana, the leader of the Israeli party Kach, raised the issue of forbidding sexual relationships between Arabs and Jews in the Israeli Parliament) (Yuval-Davis 220). Other prominent feminists like Cynthia Enloe explain that nationalism is often based on patriarchal practices, constructing women as possessions and men as protectors (Enloe 222).

Algeria’s case has become a famous caution of the injuries of nationalism, even as a liberation politics. It is repeatedly declared that Algerian women joined the national liberation movement (from 1954 to 1962) for independence from French colonialism and were subsequently sent back home after independence

was won. Algeria was likened to the case of Western feminists who similarly describe their experiences in Second World War era Britain and North America, during which they became nurses or were ushered into the workforce (doing factory work etc.) only to be ushered back into the home in the 1950s when employment was needed for returned soldiers. These examples have become paradigmatic in feminist writings on the dangers of nationalism. Sherna Berger Gluck describes the false feminist promises of national liberation movements in the “Third World” and uses the example of Algeria to show how “gender interests are subverted” following independence. She explains that once women’s bodies are no longer needed to carry weapons they are sent back home and out of the public sphere (“Shifting” 101). According to Enloe, “living as a nationalist feminist” became “one of the most difficult political projects” of today’s world (223).

Fears of the realization of a similar fate for women in Palestine began to ring through the Palestinian women’s movement, particularly during the first *intifada*: “At the height of the *intifada*, women activists regularly echoed the refrain: ‘We will not be another Algeria’—vowing they would not allow their interests to be subverted to political processes, as occurred in Algeria following independence” (Gluck, “Palestinian” 5). An epigraph to Philippa Strum’s introduction in her book *The Women are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* also reads: “The women of Palestine will not be like the

women of Algeria!” (1). Algeria was the exemplary cautionary tale for women engaging in colonial liberation struggles.

Some Arab women have begun simultaneously discussing the *complexities* of liberation. In “Algeria: Sharing the Struggle” Bouthaina Shabaan explains, after interviewing women in Algeria, that “women claimed their place in post-revolutionary society” (182):

Today half the students in Algerian schools and universities are female, there are women engineers, doctors, Members of Parliament, and one Government Minister is a woman. The National Union of Algerian Women, like the workers’ unions and the students’ union, is expected to play a part in the national political life, though this role is seen as subject to the overall authority of the FLN.<sup>81</sup>

Shabaan acknowledges the revolution’s role in bringing women, albeit in limited forms, out of their homes, and its role in the retention of women’s public and political lives in post-revolution Algeria. She then warns about the general influence of Muslim fundamentalists in the Arab world—hinting at the ways nationalism is further complicated by the porousness of the nation and the ways it is never a culturally, politically or economically isolated entity—and the re-emergence of the veil on the streets.<sup>82</sup> Thus women’s oppression and liberation in Algeria continue through various axes of national and extra-national processes, not so easily dictated by the temporality of the national liberation struggle (its beginning and end).

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<sup>81</sup> The FLN is the National Liberation Front which today remains the largest political party in Algeria.

<sup>82</sup> The use of the veil by women has also been thoroughly complicated by feminist theorists as representing various (dis)empowering roles in women’s political lives.

During our interview, Islah Jad cited the infamous example of Algeria, which she insisted was constantly evoked by Western feminists to prioritize gendered solidarities with Western women. Jad argues, “it’s a whole deformation of what happened. [The statement about Algeria from Western feminists] came once as a statement” and “it stuck everywhere.” She explains her perspective through her own research and conversations with Algerian women:

Look at *mujahiddaat* women and their status in Algerian society. Look at their[sic] achievements they managed to introduce? Who said that Algerian women after the war went back home? It’s not true. Not true. Who said that Algerian national liberation movement women are only used...? [...] women who are active in the national, *they* change themselves, their community, their families. We have many studies that those who were involved in the national movement...they study differently, they live differently, get married differently, they raise their kids differently, which means these people *changed* by being part of the national.

Jad relates her own experiences of being involved in a national movement and simultaneously fighting for gender equality:

I remember at the very beginning of the establishment of the Palestinian authority, when...the deputy ministers asked for male consent to issue passport. And it took us less than one hour and we pushed him: “What are you talking about? When you were sending women to carry weapons from one place to another or to carry messages for the fighters from abroad to here, did *you* ask these women to give their consent of their male guardian before *you* send them?” He laughed! “Of course not!” “So why are you asking us to?”...we ridiculed him. And it didn’t take us more than one hour to change what he issued as a rule. So who says that once the struggle ends this guy can tell us whatever he wants...? It’s not true. It’s not true here and it was not true in Algeria. Look at Algeria, how many doctors, how many lawyers, how many brilliant women they have in each field of life. This happened because women were integral parts of the resistance movement and women were *never* sent back home as the myth keeps repeating itself. *Yes* women did not achieve all that they wanted but this is a continuous struggle exactly as Western women struggle *until now*.

Jad seems to want to give some agency to the work of Algerian women who continue on the heavy work and toil of everyday feminist activism in their own countries, battling what Shaaban has highlighted as a combination of local and extra-national processes which work to oppress women and Algerian people in general.

Kumari Jayawardena similarly describes the complexities between feminism and nationalism as she studies the role of women in anti-colonial nationalist struggles and in post-independence periods with a focus on Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Sri Lanka, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Korea. She explains that women were, in different ways, called into political involvement and action and argues that nationalist movements facilitated the involvement of women even while their political participation was limited by the goals of bourgeois capitalist local reformers as well as foreign interests. In elaborating on this, Jayawardena complicates the liberatory potential of both the feminisms of the colonizing nation and the feminisms of the anti-colonial movement. For example, Jayawardena explains how women, within their nation, are frequently encouraged to “civilize” themselves for capitalist and bourgeois development (reform seen as needed to defeat the enemy) but that women’s connections across national borders are almost always controlled by local men (259). Jayawardena also points out that even when women entered the capitalist workforce (a Western liberal symbol of women’s liberation) they found themselves constrained by a male-dominated system (259). In effect, while Jayawardena conducts a thorough

analysis of the detailed nuances of the ways that colonialism effected the production of nationalist struggles and feminist movements, she maintains that men organized the nationalist struggles and continue, after liberation, to set the parameters of liberation (260).

Jayawardena notes, however, that there are other effects that resulted from these movements. For example, the relationships that women created across colonial and national lines continued to persist in making relationships across borders despite significant challenges to doing so. Jayawardena shows that feminist goals of attaining access to education, for example, facilitated the exchange of ideas between women throughout the world so that women could think about the underlying foundational subordination of women (such as oppressive family structures).<sup>83</sup> As such, Jayawardena leaves room, albeit limited, for the possibilities that nationalist struggles against colonial oppression might facilitate long lasting and foundational feminist activism that continues on past “liberation.” Moreover, she gestures to the ways transnational feminism worked

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<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Charlotte Weber’s dissertation *Making Common Cause? Western And Middle Eastern Feminists In The International Women’s Movement, 1911-1948* discusses the overlapping nationalisms, internationalisms and anti-nationalisms of the “Eastern” or Arab women’s movement in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her discussions of the ways in which Arab governments attempted to “contain” women’s movements in the Arab world is combined with a detailed study of the effects of Orientalist feminisms on the oppression of Arab women as well as the importance of anti-Western Arab feminist nationalisms. Her analyses illustrate the complexities with which one is to ascertain the productivity of feminist nationalisms and anti-nationalisms in colonial contexts.

in some oppressive ways to prioritise a particularly liberal form of feminism, which, at times operated in detrimental ways to local feminists.

Arab feminists such as El Saadawi and Ghada Sughayar point to similar complexities. El Saadawi is cautious of the ways that national movements can use women and then send them back home but casts a wider net. El Saadawi stresses that Arab women's feminism is a "response to class, group, and professional oppression [...] and it is also a response to national oppression—since the Arab women are a part of the Arab nation, which is subjected to exploitation by international capitalism and Zionism" (242). She explains that this oppression dates back thousands of years into history and is "triple" in form because they are oppressed by "the nation, international capitalism and Zionism" (242). El Saadawi argues that Palestinian women "know the link between imperialism and Zionism internationally, and the patriarchal and class systems locally" (259). As such Palestinian women know the complexity of oppression that they face and therefore the complexity of their ensuing liberation struggles.

Ghada Sughayar recalls experiences during which her work in the JCW was regulated and controlled by "the Israeli government [and] the Palestinian Authority when it was established in the early nineties" and sometimes by "a donor driven agenda." But she currently refuses to be called a feminist (despite her history of and interests in radically woman-centred anti-oppression work) because of feminism's association with colonialism and her experiences of



discrimination and racism in the Jerusalem Link. In fact, her fight against imperialism or her national liberation struggle includes fighting against particular forms of feminism. Moreover, her activism for women requires that she fight at the level of national liberation (to liberate women and racialized people from systemic and violent oppression). Her reality, like the reality of many other women—because of the ways feminism was part of the imperial project—cannot be adequately described by the kind of nationalism-feminism binary that Lentin assumes in her dialogue with Abdo.

In *Feminist Nationalism* Lois A. West gestures to the regulation of feminist work on nationalism. She explains:

For the past several decades activist women all over the world have been organizing around women's and nationalist issues—sometimes quietly advocating nonviolence and working for women's citizenship rights, other times working in consort with armed guerrilla movements under situations of occupation. (xii)

She says that “although there has been contention over how much these activities *count* as ‘feminist’ or ‘nationalist,’” her own research demonstrates how “women have been creating social movement organizations and working in international ‘solidarity’ networks in activities and efforts that are varied and diverse” (xiii).

One effect of “these efforts is to reconstruct old words—*feminism* and *nationalism*—in new contexts” (xiii).

In “The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism” Ranjoo Seodu Herr argues that while “Third World nationalists consistently exploited Third World

feminists,” the relationship between the two “cannot be severed once and for all” (135). Herr offers a “reconceptualization of nationalism so that it can actively protect and promote Third World feminisms” (136) and warns against the “essentialism of traditional nationalists” (148). For Herr, “the ‘ethnocentric’ nationalism of colonizers, pursuing the subjugation of weaker nations, cannot be morally justified” (149) but “people within the oppressed nation(s), faced with the bleak future of systemic oppression and exploitation, may legitimately opt for resistant movements” (149).

Some Palestinian women I interviewed argue that nationalist struggles and feminism can go hand in hand with the critique of a male dominated nation-state. Others argue that the critique of nationalism as a male-construct does not square up with Palestinian women’s understandings of the functions of society (where family and male children in particular are the targets of colonialist violence). Still others like Sughayar argue that nationalism trumps gender (even while she works at *Aman*, which is comprised of ex-politicians and academics documenting governmental corruption in Palestine). Jad argues “there have been many improvements in the official rights of Palestinian women but we cannot constitutionalize these progressions because we have no state. What’s the point of working for feminism when we can’t legalize our victories?” For Jad, while these gender-based improvements are helpful in everyday life in Palestine, building on them in an “official” way, which might help guarantee them for future women, is difficult if not impossible because of the occupation.

If a racialized woman cannot fully isolate whether her rape by a man is because of her gender or her race (Smith, “Anticolonial Response”) then the prioritization of one liberatory model over the other becomes impossible. The WCLAC has documented rising cases of incest and sexual assault in Palestinian homes which are under long and strict curfews. Sughayar describes being physically and sexually tortured by an IOF/IDF soldier in prison when she was a feminist activist in the JCW precisely because of the ways she amalgamated her feminist work (which gave her a strong platform from which to speak) with her anti-colonial activism. In other instances, however, Palestinian women have pointed to the ways in which the occupation (and its accompanying aid and peace industries) has given women jobs and education while subordinating and humiliating Arab men.

West’s mention of the contention over how particular activities “count” as feminist or nationalist implies that someone is “counting” (Ahmed, “Whose”), someone is an assessor of such criteria. West continues to emphasize the importance of contextualizing the lexicon used by political movements. While it is important not to fall into the trap of “‘sentimentalism’ which assumes that the oppressed are purer and more noble because they have suffered” (Elshtain 616), and thus assume that any politics of the oppressed is sound (or that Palestinians would inherently behave differently once in power), it is important to think about the ways that the “top-down” discursive structures operate in these debates about nationalism and feminism in ways that erase the complexities of anti-colonial or

popular nationalist struggles. It is not the goal of this chapter to thoroughly examine the relationship between nationalism and feminism. I hope instead to highlight Western feminism's binary thinking around nationalism and feminism to point to the ways that the experiences of colonized and occupied women are not fully heard. As such the Western binaristic language becomes one of erasure and imposition, particularly as it operates as authoritative Truth, or as a tool of assessing intelligence, honesty and feminist criticality. Proliferations of meaning or "difference" between women are "contained" within that which is deemed possible by authoritative Western theory, which continues to insist on womanhood as an equalizing and universalizing politics, even when it declares it is not doing this. This conundrum manifests the prevalent racial logics that continue to operate in critical academic feminist dialogues.

For example, Abdo insists that her on-the-ground experiences of life in Israel (in Israeli schools and jails, for example) as a Palestinian have "created favourable conditions for prioritizing nationalism over gender issues, for making me more a 'Palestinian' than a gendered being, a woman" (9). A new language is evidently required, even different than Abdo's, who herself risks reinstating feminism and nationalism as separate when using words like "subsuming" and "overshadowed" to hierarchicize the two terms in different ways. But the problem of "listening" (even when it is paired with capitulation by an *othered* woman) continues to stand out as a major challenge. Palestinian women have begun stepping out of this dialectic of listener and frustrated speaker, as I explore in

Chapter five through the politics of the dialogue-boycott; however, it is important to reflect on the process which has led up to this point.

Interestingly, Lentin's imposition of the nationalism-feminism binary and her inability to hear Abdo's criticism of state nationalism and support for popular street nationalism, does not allow her to see that they (Lentin and Abdo) agree on major principles of feminism including the valorization of a one-state solution. I argue that the one-state solution does not fully address the "critical" and theoretical problems with nationalism and nations in general (for it would continue to be a nation, with all its complementary exclusions), but I do want to highlight the ways that the top-down approach does not allow women to see their agreement when it already exists. Unfortunately, by presumptively reading Abdo's popular nationalism as state-nationalism Lentin ushers in a debate that is not wholly applicable to the two women's positions, who agree on their criticisms of state-nationalism. For Abdo, the one-state solution would still require *intifada* (popular uprising) in the streets by all the people of Israel and Palestine (including Jewish Israelis, Palestinian citizens, and occupied Palestinians) and Lentin agrees that Jewish Israelis will need to create stronger resistance movement. Abdo explains:

A democratic secular state is a long-term project that requires readiness and commitment to such a solution on the part of Israeli Jews. Where are the Israeli-Jewish secular democratic forces—I mean forces, not individuals? Where is the Israeli anti-racist, anti-Zionist movement—I mean movement, not individuals? Where is [sic] the Israeli anti-militaristic state campaigns—I mean campaigns, not individuals? In a

heavily militaristic garrison like Israel, there is hardly a civil society, let alone a serious resistance to this state! (27)<sup>84</sup>

Abdo reminds Lentin that the one-state solution has garnered a lot of Palestinian support (sometimes divided by those who seek a bi-national state and others a democratic secular state for all citizens including Arab Druze and Mizrahim Jews), but she argues that this goal cannot be realized with Palestinian support alone. Lentin acknowledges the challenges of nationalism in Israeli women's movements and Abdo argues, this would continue to be a problem in the promotion of a one-state solution. She explains that during the Al-Aqsa *intifada* she had “disgust, if not surprise, at the self-silencing of Israeli feminists, most of whom—together with other Israeli intellectuals—lined up with Barak's government” (12). For many, if not all on the left, the one-state solution would alter the Jewish nature of the Israeli state (demographically) even without the Right of Return because Arabs are beginning to outnumber Jewish people in the region both in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.<sup>85</sup> Therefore the

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<sup>84</sup> Abdo also describes intolerance for “difference” in the Israeli feminist movement when she describes an Israeli feminist conference during which she (and Lentin) were received in a hostile fashion and aggressively silenced because they chose to speak in English after being asked to speak in Hebrew. Abdo was not welcome to speak in her native Arabic language either.

<sup>85</sup> This is often referred to, in Israeli political discourse, as a demographic threat, “demographic bomb” or “demographic revolution” (Benvenisti). Many Israeli feminists have intimated this goal to me in personal communications and in public lectures, particularly when the issue of the Right of Return comes up. For example, self-declared left wing academic Na'ama Carmi (an Israeli professor at Haifa University) spoke about the importance of a two-state solution in creating “two states for two people” (at York University's *Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace* Conference). Carmi argues that the

ethnic nationalism of Israeli activists stand in the way of a one-state solution because of the demographic threat. Moreover, “critical” feminist academic activists like Lentin argue that the two-state solution is “unenlightened.” In contrast, Israeli feminists who propose the two-state solution are not accused of being too nationalistic by other Israeli feminists, indeed they are actually perceived as progressive in aiding the Palestinians towards sovereignty. The Palestinian woman who wants a two-state solution, on the other hand, is not critical enough. Palestinian women then end up somewhere between these two

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rejection of the Right of Return is the only consensus in Israel even among those divided between the right and left of politics and promotes a kind of nationalism that ensures the ethnic composition of Israel remains Jewish (an ethno-culturally exclusive nationalism). When the audience retorted that—legally—Palestinian refugees have the right to return (according to General Assembly Resolution 194 and article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), Carmi responded that even if the Right of Return was granted by law, it is “politically impossible” and “will amount to national suicide.” Carmi reminded the audience that the Right of Return for Palestinians includes the descendants of refugees who could total four million people (if they *all* returned, that is) (Carmi). But according to Hazem Jamjoum, Carmi’s co-presenter at the same conference, two thirds of refugee land is currently uninhabited. Therefore the large number of returnees is not so much a logistical issue for Carmi and other Israeli activists as it is an anxiety about the purity of an ethnically (religiously?) characterized nation. Thus, her solution is that refugees go to the new Palestine state (which will exist beside Israel). She assumes that Palestinians from Haifa or Jaffa for example, are looking to reconnect culturally and ethnically with their people even if in another city from their home-city, but ignores that they have connections to their lands and their homes (some still standing with Jewish families living inside). After being challenged by the audience Carmi concludes, “those who insist on everything are left with nothing.” Such sentiments about the impossibility of return and the prioritization of an ethnic state are not uncommon amongst the left in Israel. Gila Svirsky, in conversation with me, noted the resistance to the Right of Return even amongst the most politically left leaning groups in Israel who are largely vested in the ethnic character of the formally Jewish state of Israel.

poles which are formed by Israeli women and neither the one-state solution nor the two-state solution becomes possible within the status quo dialogues.

Anti-nationalist feminism is being applied in asymmetrical ways in Israeli-Palestinian dialogues wherein the two-state solution is seen as “critical” only if proposed by an Israel activist and the one-state solution is something that the Palestinian woman is largely helpless to try to promote. Moreover, her advocacy of popular national liberation movements are read into the feminist critiques of state-nationalisms and also delegitimized by Israeli participants in dialogue. At the same time the largely nationalist assumption of Israeli feminists, particularly during times of “exception” as we will explore in the next chapter, are not in the same position of being “assessed” by Palestinian woman because of the power differentials. I would like to highlight the internalized and normalized dynamics with which “white” women seem to offer more “enlightened” solutions with authority even while they do not seriously consider the nuanced theorizations of the *othered*. While Lentin critiques Abdo’s nationalisms for being theoretically unsound, her own idealized solution of a one-state solution is also theoretically flawed. Lentin’s solution is also one which occupied Palestinian women living in the West Bank cannot work towards (there would need to be *intifada* by Israeli citizens, Arab and Jewish). I argue that Abdo and Lentin’s dialogue ultimately replicates the *To Die* dynamic in which the Palestinian woman works to “convince” the Israeli woman that she has indeed thought about these “enlightened” concepts but insists they do not apply seamlessly to her realities



(working within the East-West discursive terrain). Often this insistence is not heard because of the authority of the “white” woman in the discursive terrain that structures their dialogue. Abigail and Lentin pressure Um Samir and Abdo, to varying degrees, to agree to key political terms like universal womanhood or anti-nationalism, which reflects some of the problematic dynamics of contemporary East-West or as El Saadawi calls it “North-South” academic feminist dialogues articulated by many anti-racist and anti-colonial feminists.

This chapter is an important contribution to the study of dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian women because it illustrates the ways colonial discursive impositions are not necessarily eliminated from the discourse of “critical” anti-racist Israeli and international academic feminists. Oftentimes academic or feminist dialogues are held up as exceptional to state-level, political dialogues. Yet I have pointed to some of the more subtle ways that critical dialogues can continue to perpetuate a silencing and erasure of the complexity of racialized women’s stories and realities. In this way, we can see how the discursive environment as a whole (even in subversive forms, thus far) is comprehensively informed by an Orientalist and colonial ideology, undergirded by power differentials. In the next chapter, I will outline some more mainstream or dominant competing stories and historical narratives between Israelis and Palestinians, demonstrate how the Israeli narratives continue to guide Israeli feminisms and finally, explore the consequences of this influence on Palestinian women’s lives and future possibilities for Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues.

#### **Chapter Four: The Broader Effects of Orientalist Discursive Environments on the Daily Lives of Israeli and Palestinian Women and Feminist Solidarities**

Thus far we have explored “the top-down approach” and the material conditions which make it easy to say that Israeli feminist activists are “too few and ineffective,” although there is another component to the latter sentiment which is explored in this chapter. This chapter explores how hegemonic Israeli-state discourse is reflected in Israeli feminist discourse and practice in an effort to contextualize Palestinian women interviewees’ sentiments that “Israeli women fall down on feminist principles” and “the whole pyramid is upside down.” I outline the political happenings around what the Israeli government calls “Cast Lead” and what Palestinians call the ongoing attacks on Gaza particularly the obliteration of infrastructure and killing of civilians in the Winter of 2008 and 2009, to illustrate how Israeli-Palestinian women’s solidarity dynamics predictably break down during Israeli-declared times of “exception.” I sketch out ways that Palestinian women challenge the narrative of exception or the isolated “event” by proliferating stories of the “everyday” and offering contextualizations of their daily lives through web-posts, interviews and poetry that challenge Israeli hegemonic historical narratives. Consistently, Palestinian women situate “events” within the ongoing dealings of the occupation. Ultimately, however, I argue, with reference to the contents of previous chapters in this dissertation, that the larger Orientalist discursive environment—which, through the event, imagines Israeli violence towards Palestinians as “resultant,” temporary and paternalistic—has the

effect of dismissing those contextualizations and facilitates the continuous interrogation of the Palestinian woman. As such Israeli history and its associated power continues to create dire material effects for Palestinian (and Israeli) women by rationalizing the continuing occupation. Israeli hegemonic “war” discourse and Israeli feminist discourse work together to position the Palestinian woman as accountable for purportedly *initiating* Palestinian violence and the *resultant* although wiser and paternalistic Israeli violence. This chapter and the following Chapter Five will explore the ways Palestinian women are attempting to dismantle the discursive power of Israeli history. Before I explore the case study of “Cast Lead” or Gaza, it is important to consider storytelling and history’s relationship to power.

### **A Note on History and Power**

Feminist historian Joan Wallach Scott argues that what humans know of history today “reflects and creates relations of power” (Scott 681). The history of History as a discipline in North American academia, for example, is one of hegemony and boundary maintenance (681). According to Scott, it was usually white, upper class men, who invoked anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism sought to enforce the “orthodoxy of a single standpoint, a single vision of what counts as historical knowledge” (686). For Scott, this insistence on an authoritative, single history was elite, white males’ way of resisting “democratization,” a movement

within which racialized people and women challenged historical knowledge by emphasizing its exclusions. Elite versions of history were challenged by “varieties of interpretations, varieties of histories, and historians of diverse philosophies, all of which threaten the uniformity, continuity, and homogeneity that orthodox historians [in the United States] have traditionally sought to impose” (686).

Feminists like Adrienne Rich, for example, unpacked the patriarchal values of history-telling in the West, critiquing “the notion of history as a totalizing objective science,” as a master narrative, or a Truth (Scott 687). As early as 1920 Carl Becker argued that “‘history’ consisted of many stories, all partial, all constructed to explain something, to ‘derive satisfactory meaning’” and he renounced “omniscience” (qtd. in Scott 687). Black history, women’s history and labor history began to be explored by the 1930s and 1940s (687). While elite white males feared that deconstruction of the official historical record was “anarchy” (689) and that “truth” would no longer be a ground for history (689), feminist historians demonstrated that “history consists of many irreconcilable stories” (689). While traditional historians feared that history had lost its “accuracy,” Scott argues that history is an interpretive practice that “acknowledges that the meanings attributed to events of the past always vary, that the knowledge we produce is contextual [...] never absolute” (690). The plurality of stories, however, creates contests about power and knowledge. Scott recognizes that while there are many stories, some are materialized through

power. She asks: “How has the exclusion of some stories from the record of the past perpetuated inequalities based on attributions of difference?” (690)

In Israel and Palestine the importance of history telling (and its relationship to power) became clear when a dual narrative (Israeli and Palestinian) history textbook was produced by multiple Palestinian and Israeli authors called *Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative: Palestinians and Israelis* (Adwan 2003). In “The PRIME Shared History Project: Peace-Building Project under Fire” Adwan and Bar-On explain that through the textbook project they were creating “an innovative school booklet that contains two narratives, the Israeli narrative and the Palestinian narrative, around certain dates or milestones in the history of the conflict” (312). The authors also inserted an extra column between the two narratives for students to write their own thoughts and the teacher’s input. The authors hope that “each student will learn [...] the narrative of the other, in addition to the familiar own narrative [sic], as a first step toward acknowledging and respecting the other” (Adwan “The PRIME” 312). The Palestinian Authority’s Education Ministry reviewed the book and approved it, while the Israeli Education Ministry banned it in schools (Kashti). Such a dismissal of Palestinian stories influences Israeli culture, hinders the Israeli population from receiving formal education about Palestinian narratives, and has the effect of maintaining ongoing oppressive Israeli foreign and domestic policy towards Palestinians.

Histories of Palestinian women are particularly important. In an article published by PASSIA (Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs) an anonymous author writes:

The history of Palestinian women is being lost, distorted and eroded as time passes. It is slipping out of our hands due to a subtle process of neglect, and a lack of recognition in the traditional field of history of the narratives of over half of the population merely because of their gender. (“Table”)

When asked, ‘why are you singling women out from the history as a whole?’” the author responds:

I am not interested in segregating Palestinian women from men in history, but rather in providing a corrective to the usual historical narrative that presents history as "a universal human story exemplified by the lives of men." As a result of this historical tradition, women are noticeable for their absence in almost all accounts of Palestinian history. (“Table”)

Israeli history also operates, in this way, to silence Palestinian women’s lives and stories (even domestically by silencing the narratives of Israel’s own Palestinian citizens). PASSIA’s anonymous author insists that, “knowledge of the past” and I would add of the present, “in its entirety helps contextualize and deepen understanding of the current situation” (“Table”).

### **Stories of “Exception” as a Mechanism of the Continuing Occupation**

There are various ways in which the Gaza crisis was narrated by Israel as an exceptional and contained event called “Cast Lead,” in which there were a set of goals to be achieved in a temporally limited operation. The idea of *achieving goals* was ubiquitous in media interviews with Tzipi Livni<sup>86</sup> (Weymouth) and Ehud Olmert (Harel) who was the Prime Minister of Israel at the time (from 2006-2009). These goals were generally vague but sometimes referred to *weakening* Hamas and to bringing an end to the smuggling of weapons from Egypt to Gaza. When Israel declared that the three-week comprehensive offensive was over, Olmert also announced that Israel had achieved its “goals” and objectives (“Olmert: We”; “Israel Achieved”). The Israeli government’s victory dance indicated a beginning, middle and an end, a finish line, a completion. The three-week offensive thus stood on its own as a historical event—as a disruption of an otherwise mundane daily life—that was primarily framed and could only be understood as a contained event because of Olmert’s (and others’) declarations of goals achieved between a distinct beginning and an end.

The Gaza crisis was given all the accoutrements of an isolated event. It was given a title (Operation “Cast Lead”), and a closing memorialization for the dead and the grieving. The beginning of this crisis, according to Olmert, occurred

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86 Tzipi Livni is the current (and first woman) Israeli Opposition Leader and leader of Kadima, the largest party in the Knesset. Interestingly she is considered to be a controversial leader who critiques and opposes hard-line policies like those of Benjamin Netanyahu (the current Prime Minister of Israel). Recently, she was noted for applauding Obama in putting pressure on Netanyahu to consider the two-state solution.

when " Hamas broke [a six month long] cease-fire" on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2008 ("Olmert: No Peace"). This beginning point is debated by many sources, some citing that the ceasefire was broken by Israel in November, and others citing the beginning point as the 2006 siege or the originary *Nakba* which produced the population of struggling Gazan refugees in 1948. Israel's official narration of "Cast Lead" as "completed" leaves many threads loose and questions unanswered.

Gaza disappeared from most Western and international media headlines after January 2009, but Israeli attacks did not end then. Death tolls were still being tallied months later as dead Gazans were dug out of rubble. For example, on March 23, 2009 sixteen Palestinian medical personnel were killed by Israeli fire when "Israel attacked thirty-four medical facilities, including eight hospitals" ("Israel Accused"). On May 2, 2009 Israeli warplanes bombed tunnels beneath the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, killing two Palestinians ("Two Palestinians"). These attacks resembled the attacks on Gaza's infrastructure that the world saw during "Cast Lead," but they resided outside of the temporal and narrative boundaries of the exceptional—and reportable—war. Moreover, Hamas rockets continued to be fired into Israel. These attacks, amongst many others, were underreported in Western news. For example, Canadian news stations stopped reporting on the deaths occurring in Gaza once Israel declared the event over. Moreover, contrary to Israel's declared "goal" achieved of weakening Hamas, Hamas is still in power in Gaza. As for the circumstances of the Gazan



people, their lives are relatively the same: the borders around Gaza are still continuously restricted, continuing the siege and serving to slowly choke and starve its civilian inhabitants. Furthermore, Israelis living in southern Israel are still afraid of Hamas. Violence at the Gaza border continues on a daily basis between the IDF/IOF and Palestinians (including farmers, civilians and members of Hamas).

While Israelis titled this event as “Cast Lead,” Palestinians and Arabic media usually referred to “the violence in Gaza,” conveying a sense that “Cast Lead” was an intensification of already-present violence that was and is far from extraordinary. Palestinians would often say “the Gazans are being destroyed,” but the violence in December 2008 and January 2009 was seldom if ever narrated by Palestinians as an event. Visiting the West Bank right after “Cast Lead” was declared completed, I found that Palestinians spoke about the continuing suffering of Gazans as an ongoing process. For Palestinians, the continuing deaths after “Cast Lead” were part of the same process as the earlier deaths of 1400 people in December and January and were often narrated as a continuation of the same deaths and sufferings that resulted from the 1948 Nakba

The notion of “Cast Lead” as an exceptional event seeped into Israeli feminist discourse as they engaged Palestinian women during the months of December and January. Not only were Palestinian women’s divergent temporal narratives not incorporated into Israeli solidarity work during “Cast Lead,” but

when Palestinian women were invited onto the international media stage (through *The Association for Women's Rights and Development* (AWID), for example), it was through narrow questions about the impacts of the attacks on women.

In January 2009, AWID published an article entitled “The War in Gaza: What is the Impact on Women?” in which the interviewer, Rochelle Jones, asks Islah Jad about the Gaza crisis. Jones asks Jad about her analysis of Israel’s attacks on Gaza; how Palestinian women are impacted by the crisis; if there have been any acts or efforts of solidarity from Israeli women’s rights activists; what Palestinian women’s strategies of mobilization have been; and finally, what might be her suggestions on strategies to bring about peace.<sup>87</sup> Jones situates “womanhood” as a point of entry for dialogue on the effects of the attacks on Gaza. Jad re-organizes the point of entry of “womanhood,” facilitated by her status as a Women’s Studies professor, by referring immediately to the 1948 *Nakba*. When asked about women she talks about “community,” speaking of colonialism and occupation’s effects on families. She further positions the Israeli attacks entitled “Cast Lead” within a larger temporal framework, the ongoing narrative of the Israeli occupation.

Jones does not use the term “Cast Lead.” Instead, she refers to “Israel’s military operation in Gaza” or “the current situation,” indicating something of an exceptional awareness of the function of Israel’s official name for the military

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<sup>87</sup> See Jones for full text.

campaign. Jones asks: “Israel’s attacks on Gaza have taken a heavy toll. What is your understanding and analysis of the situation at the moment?” Jad responds:

The war situation in Gaza is another episode of a long series of wars and violence against the Palestinian people since their collective expulsion from their homes in 1948 to create and establish the state of Israel to solve what the Zionist Movement called the ‘Jewish problem.’ (Jones)

Jad goes on to explain that the inhabitants of Gaza are mostly “refugees from villages and cities now inside Israel and close to Gaza (Majdal, Askalan, Ramleh etc.)” who were “expelled from their homes in 1948.” She recounts that Gazans have endured “non-stop wars” that began in 1948 when “Israeli planes were attacking refugees in their march to find a secure place to stay,” followed by more attacks in 1951, 1956, 1967 and between 1970 and 1971. Jad contextualizes the events in Gaza with reference to a long history of military attacks, continuous targeted assassinations, the repression of particular political groups through imprisonments and the Israeli-imposed siege on Gaza (since 2006) which blocks food and fuel supplies from Gazans, interrupts access to electricity, and pollutes natural water resources. She goes on to foreground the preceding suffering of the Gazan people who were slowly starving and increasingly under-nourished during the ongoing four-year siege.

Furthermore, Jad challenges Israeli hegemonic discourse that polarizes Israel against Hamas by contextualizing Hamas’ rise to power and revealing Israeli interference in the democratic process between Hamas and Fatah. Jad explains that Hamas was “pressured by the Palestinian Authority” (PA) who was

at the time seen as a “friend” of Israel as well as by “the Americans to join the elections”<sup>88</sup> and that Hamas made the “terrible mistake” of winning the elections. Jad explains that when Hamas won more than 70% of Parliamentary seats they were punished for winning and since that election, Israel has imposed a siege on all Palestinian territories in the West Bank and in Gaza. Hamas took power in Gaza in June 2007 when the “Americans and Israelis refused a national unity government with Hamas.” According to Jad, conflicts have erupted since then and when Egypt brokered a ceasefire, Israel would not respect it. Her narrative of recent events contextualizes them as part of a “total war” against Gaza that aims to “destroy all infrastructures” and consequently displace and kill thousands of families. The *Nakba* over sixty years ago, the punishment through the siege, the ongoing socio-political control of refugees in Gaza and recent crises are, for her, part of the ongoing, *contemporaneous* and causal “colonial policy” aimed at creating a “pure” Jewish state (and therefore, consistently depleting Gaza of sovereignty). Jad’s interview responses re-establish the inhabitants of Gaza as refugees from 1948 Palestine to spatially and temporally widen the narrative of “Cast Lead.”

When Jad is specifically asked about the impact of the current attacks on women she spends some time describing women’s suffering (e.g. digging their

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<sup>88</sup> There is some speculation that Hamas was actually supported by Israel (through the PA and America) to become a powerful faction before they ran for elections.

children out of rubble) but then goes on to re-emphasize the communal aspect of the suffering by telling the stories of families:

Whole families have been exterminated by Israeli artillery from air, sea and ground. The example of the Samouni family is just one case. The Samouni family work on their agricultural land at the outskirts of Gaza - it is a big extended family. The Israeli army asked the family last week to stay together in one house. More than 160 gathered together, and once they were all settled in one house the army opened fire, killing instantly 30 people - mostly women and children.

Tens of houses have been destroyed on their inhabitant's heads. Many families moved to empty schools run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), but the Israeli artillery followed them in their new refuge and killed, in one example 42 Palestinians - again mostly women and children. This led the UNRWA director in Gaza to ask for an international investigation to document the so [sic] many war crimes committed against the civilians in Gaza. (Jones)

While Jad mentions that the victims are mostly “women and children” (emphasizing that women are often the ones who re-organize society after such atrocities), it is difficult to know whether she is purposely making these references repeatedly in order to secure audibility through the interviewer's questions and the AWID audience. Nevertheless, while she might be highlighting her “feminism” in terms that AWID would recognize, she also prioritizes the impact on whole communities and families, including men. Moreover, even while Jad expresses her concerns with Palestinian women's suffering, she indicates disillusionment with feminist solidarity networks, as it stands. When asked by Jones whether there is “solidarity and action coming from Israeli women's rights activists” Jad responds:

Up to the moment of writing of this text, the war on Gaza is approved by 91% of the Israeli public. A few Israeli organizations are making efforts to stand by the Palestinians, in particular Physicians for Human Rights. Israeli women's organisations at large did not move a finger to denounce the war crimes committed by their army and government against the Palestinian women and children. To this moment 930 Palestinians have been killed - 292 of them are children (32%) and 75 women (8.2%). However, *no Israeli organisations for women or children have taken a clear cut position against this crazy war.*

In such situations the brunt of the war and re-organisation of the social fabric is left to women. Again, Palestinian women will be busy making ends meet with the rising level of poverty and unemployment. All the dreams about law reform, strategic gender needs and mainstreaming gender... all will be on the shelves for years to come. (Jones, my emphasis)

Jad's lack of faith in feminist solidarities (a sentiment which echoes interviewees' comments that "they are too few and ineffective"), I argue, emanate from the ways in which Israeli feminist solidarities—when they are expressed—are inflected by hegemonic Israeli narratives of violence as exceptional "events" (occurring between two equally violent warring entities). This is apparent through Israeli feminist reactions to "Cast Lead" or Gaza which make Israeli women appear to be "falling down on feminist principles."

Israeli feminist responses to the attacks on Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009 treated the attacks as an event that required a "ceasefire" on "both sides." According to Gila Svirsky, in the winter of 2008 and 2009, twenty-three Israeli women's organizations issued a "strong statement against Israel's actions." This statement, however, did not name "actors" of violence and did not come across as

a statement “against Israel’s actions.” The statement, entitled “In Protest of War,” reads thus:

We women’s organizations from a broad spectrum of political views demand an end to the bombing and other tools of death, and call for the immediate start of deliberations to talk peace and not make war. The dance of death and destruction must come to an end.

We demand that war no longer be an option, nor violence a strategy, nor killing an alternative. The society we want is one in which every individual can lead a life of security – personal, economic, and social.

It is clear that the highest price is paid by women and others from the periphery – geographic, economic, ethnic, social, and cultural – who now, as always, are excluded from the public eye and dominant discourse.

The time for women is now.

We demand that words and actions be conducted in another language.<sup>89</sup>

It is unclear exactly who this statement is speaking to or whom it is directed towards, because it appears to be directed at *everyone* (i.e. all sides) on behalf of women *everywhere* without pointing out the specifics of this particular attack and naming the aggressor. While Svirsky may be strategically designing these statements in such a way so as to encourage more Israeli organizations to sign on (even those not particularly critical of Israel’s actions in general)—a strategy that was intimated to me during conversations with Svirsky about

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<sup>89</sup> The statement was published on various Israeli feminist websites including on Gila Svirsky’s website (see <http://www.gilasvirsky.com/gaza.html>) and on the website of the *Coalition of Women for Peace* website (see <http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/?tag=women-against-war&lang=en>). The statement can also be found on many international websites like that of AWID’s (see <http://www.awid.org/Library/Statement-by-Women-s-Organizations-on-Gaza>).

previous acts of solidarity work with Israeli organizations to attain more support—this statement says little different than the Israeli hegemonic narrative (which also argues it wants both sides to stop this “war”). While Svirsky’s use of the term “war” in the above statement can mean ongoing struggle, it is a term often used to delineate a temporally distinct conflict (First World War, World War Two, the Civil War) with a beginning, middle and an end. In this case, Israeli women are asking to “stop” a “war” while Palestinian women are using the language of “stop the siege,” “Free Gaza” or more broadly “Free Palestine,” indicating a larger story than the two month event (and highlighting systemic inequalities in power). The former plea invites a ceasefire according to the coordinates of the mainstream Western plotlines in the media, but it does not speak about the gunfire that preceded this war or the violence that will continue to go on after the plotline of “war” is over.

Moreover, the politics of a statement such as “In Protest of War,” feminist or otherwise, are vague. To be in protest of “war” can mean various things. Many of the signatories on this statement, for example, have ambiguous politics when it comes to the occupation, the Right of Return, settler activity, torture of Palestinians and national security policies. During a rally composed of Israeli women’s groups “Against [the] Gaza Operation,” rally representatives claimed to have “a wide range of political views” and stated that they were demanding “an end to the use of instruments of killing and bombs, and to immediately sit around the negotiating table and talk peace, not war” (Ronen). Would these groups be



protesting during the killings that would occur after Israel declared the Gaza Operation over? Svirsky noted to me in our interview, that it is difficult to talk about “core” issues of the Right of Return, the wall or the checkpoint system in large feminist gatherings wherein the few who espouse anti-colonial politics are intimidated by a larger more “mainstream” crowd.

The political limitations of “In Protest of War” become even clearer when one considers that very few people in the world would declare that they do *not* want to stop war, particularly one that affects people on *both* sides. After all, most people, including Ehud Olmert, would not say that they are *for war* as a principle. During the Gaza crisis, Israeli officials and representatives of the army continuously responded to accusations that the IDF/IOF violated international law and war crimes by citing the “unfortunate” and “unavoidable [...] operational errors” that “occur in all combat” (McCarthy). This rhetoric is the same used when Olmert stated he was “sorry” and expressed regret over deaths in Gaza in 2006 (Sofer). Yet in the same stroke, Israeli officials such as Olmert use the language of necessity, exception, emergency, national security and war to regretfully and paternalistically explain the necessity of their attacks on Hamas as well as on the Gazan civilian population because Hamas is argued to be integrated within the civilian population. So being in protest of war becomes compatible with objectives such as “stop[ping] Palestinian militants firing rockets into southern Israel” and “[striking] a heavy blow to the terror organisations led by the [sic] Hamas” (McCarthy). This statement, unlike Jad’s responses, does not refer

to the displacement of thousands and killing of hundreds of Palestinians as well as the illegal occupation and siege on Gaza which would continue on past the ceasefire. The implicit sense of exceptionalism in the “In Protest of War” statement, wherein Israeli feminists do not sufficiently name the colonial nature of the situation direly affects Israeli-Palestinian women’s solidarities and dialogues. Such statements, which lack an explicit statement about ongoing occupation, leave Palestinian women feeling little solidarity.

It is important to note that some of the signatories on the statement, “In Protest of War,” *do* regularly issue other statements calling for “an end to the occupation,” particularly *Women in Black*, who do so on a consistent and daily basis. However, this language is often suspended during times of intense violence between Israelis and Palestinians in keeping with the hegemonic temporally-bounded story of an exceptional event. Since the siege of Gaza in 2006, for example, *Women in Black* has issued comprehensive statements asking for the siege to end, but when intense fighting breaks out, most left or centre-left Israelis, according to Palestinian women (and to Gila Svirsky, based on my interview with her), retreat to using “neutral language” often following common explanations that Israel’s violence is in response to the violence of Hamas. While some radical feminists, like Gila Svirsky, would disagree with this neutral or national-security-based rhetoric, Svirsky argues that few Israelis are willing to address the

occupation during an event and “war,” when Israelis perceive they are in danger.

When an event is invoked, a heightened state of exception is created.<sup>90</sup>

In *Precarious Life*, for example, Judith Butler argues that when terror alerts go out in the United States the media attention:

authorize[s] and heighten[s] racial hysteria in which fear is directed anywhere and nowhere, in which individuals are asked to be on guard but not told what to be on guard against; so everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror. (39)

The result, according to Butler, is that “an amorphous racism abounds, rationalized by the claim of ‘self-defense’” and “a generalized panic works in tandem with the shoring up of the sovereign state and the suspension of civil liberties” (39). While Butler’s analysis does not seamlessly apply to the Palestinian case, I argue that the generalized panic (and in particular Israeli feminists’ nationalist panic) works to break solidarity with Palestinian women with the expectation that after this event—that is, during “normal” times—solidarities will resume.

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<sup>90</sup> In *State of Exception* Agamben describes this state of exception, drawing on a plethora of post 9/11 examples of American mechanisms of exception like the enactment of the Patriot Act in 2001 (3), as a powerful strategy that allows—even legally sanctioned—a democratic state to behave like a totalitarian state, while still retaining its character as democratic. Agamben argues that in keeping with a “continuing tendency in all of the Western democracies, the declaration of the state of exception has gradually been replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government” (14). The state of emergency or exception can operate to suspend civil liberties and limit the “fundamental rights of [...] citizens” (19). In Israel’s case, the “event” as a state of exception further works to mask the ways that daily Israeli colonial policies and activities in the West Bank and Gaza (as well as discriminatory actions in Israel) operate on a continual “emergency” basis, as a false rationale for checkpoints, the erection of the wall and immobility measures.

As documented in my interview summaries (comprising Chapter One), Palestinian women living in the West Bank recount tales of broken ties during Cast Lead. Recall the anonymous woman I met on International Women’s Day (2009) in Hebron who had created a relationship with a woman who worked at *B’Tselem* right up to 2009. She angrily recounts her feelings of betrayal when, during operation Cast Lead, her ally did not call out Israel as the aggressive invader when she normally does so, during the “mundane” times. For the Palestinian woman, *B’Tselem* saw this as a “war” between two parties and so refused to criticize Israel during the attacks. Adding insult to injury the Palestinian woman recalls her frustration when after Israel’s perception of the assault “was over [...] she admitted to me that the attack on Gaza was wrong.” Yet, she goes on defeatedly, “but after what?” For this Palestinian woman, “this experience produced a *mistrust of ‘peace’ work,*” as she calls it, with Israeli women, wherein their solidarity is cordoned off to the times of the non-event, and becomes silent during bouts of intensified violence which work to further entrench the occupation.<sup>91</sup> She asks: “How are you going to liberate me? [...] With your silence?” These instances of exception, wherein Israeli feminist discourse mimics that of hegemonic Israeli state discourse, have the effect of discouraging Palestinian women from resuming in dialogue with Israeli women and when the Israeli event is over dialogues break down altogether.

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<sup>91</sup> For example, the destruction of Gaza’s infrastructure and the re-assertion of control in Gaza through “Cast Lead” has been argued by some Palestinians to have been a pre-meditated plan to usher in a new phase of the colonial project, wherein the siege could be further entrenched.

The parceling out of modern Palestinian history into “isolated events” is a sixty-year trend that is not exclusive to the Gaza crisis and serves to fragment modern Palestinian history into episodic events that are represented as temporary interruptions to “normalcy.” Consider, for example, the Al Aqsa *intifada* or the second uprising. It is widely believed that the beginning of the Al Aqsa *intifada* occurred when Ariel Sharon visited Al Aqsa mosque in a seemingly “provocative gesture” (“Al Aqsa Intifada”) after disillusionment with the Oslo process festered within the Palestinian communities.<sup>92</sup> Finally, the famous image of 12-year-old Muhammad Durrak, who was killed during a gun battle between Israeli troops and Palestinians in the Gaza strip (“Al Aqsa Intifada Timeline”), brought Palestinian frustration with the political process to a head and the uprising began.



Figure Eleven: Durrak was one of eight Palestinian children killed in the first three days of the Al Aqsa *Intifada*  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3677206.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3677206.stm)

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<sup>92</sup> While Palestinians became more hopeful and positive at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in practice, “none of the [Oslo-inspired] programmes turned into a chapter in nation-building” (Pappe 276).

Violence went both ways; as Palestinians and Israelis were killed in large numbers.<sup>93</sup>

While most agree that the Al Aqsa *intifada* began in 2000, European, American and Israeli sources differ from Palestinian or Middle Eastern sources on the “end” of the second *intifada*. The BBC ends the timeline of the second *intifada* in February of 2005 when Yasser Arafat died and Mahmoud Abbas became president of the Palestinian Authority (“Al Aqsa Intifada Timeline”). Similarly, an Israeli news source marks Yasser Arafat’s death as the “fizzling out” of violence (“The Al Aqsa Intifada”). Palestinian sources, on the other hand, often do not indicate an ending at all. The death of Arafat is not usually narrated as an event that stopped the second *intifada* among these sources. Many people in Palestine today use the language of the ongoing *intifada*. A Palestinian hotel worker (who wishes to remain anonymous by name), working in Jerusalem, intimated in an informal conversation with me a strong sense of political urgency when he talked about his life in the second *intifada* (referencing *today*, the summer of 2009). He referred to political acts in the present as part of the *intifada* (three years after Mahmoud Abbas took leadership in the West Bank).

While there were references to smaller phases of resistance, such phases are

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<sup>93</sup> From 2000 to 2004, there were between 885 to 1008 Israelis killed and between 2859 and 3588 Palestinians killed (Esposito 98). According to an Israeli news source, of the Israelis killed, 319 of them were soldiers. Moreover, there were 2,430 soldiers and 5,032 civilians wounded (“The Al Aqsa Intifada”). “The Palestinians suffered 3,315 fatalities and 29,181 casualties” (“The Al Aqsa Intifada”).

framed, by the hotel worker and many other Palestinians in the West Bank, as mini-stories in the larger “steadfastness”<sup>94</sup> (*sumoud*) of the Palestinian people. Similarly, writing in 2006, Ilan Pappé simply says that the 2<sup>nd</sup> *intifada* has “raged since October 2000” without reference to an end at all (276).<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the temporal finitude of the second *intifada* is contested by various groups. Palestinians often situate the second *intifada* as an ongoing daily struggle (sometimes simply continuing to live and survive in the West Bank is narrated as a form of *intifada* or resistance), while many, perhaps most, Israelis see the uprising as a violent event that ended before today’s new political leadership emerged.

Like Jad, Palestinian women constantly contextualize Israeli narrations of events by emphasizing the violence and suffering so frequent to the daily lives of Palestinians. After Jad contextualizes the everyday life of Palestinians in the interview with AWID’s Rochelle Jones in an effort to remove the Gaza crisis from the status of an “event,” she describes some of the “little” stories, often not heard by a wider public, that register the ongoing impacts of events like “Cast Lead” (Jones). Jad claims Gaza’s women are:

...weeping [...] over the coffins of their beloved children. Women in Gaza have no water, electricity, food, medicine, heat, fuel, shelter [and have to fetch them]. Many women are seen digging through the rubble of

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<sup>94</sup> Steadfastness, for Palestinians, is an important term used to reference ongoing resilience and resistance, *Sumoud* in Arabic.

<sup>95</sup> Pappé, a former Israeli soldier and historian, has been exiled from Israel for his critique of Israeli state policies.

their destroyed homes to look for their buried children. Two mothers were killed and their young kids were hanging to [sic] their bodies for four days with no food or water until the Red Cross reached their homes. (qtd. in Jones)

Similarly, Um Samir (as we see in Chapter Two) continues to situate the two daughters' lives in a longer story of enduring occupation. Um Samir attempts to refer to the occupation as the background not only for the event about which they speak but also for the dialogue in which they are partaking and its organization. When Abigail tells Um Samir to teach other Palestinians: "that what Ayat did is wrong!" Um Samir responds by contextualizing her daughter's "madness" as a consequence of Israeli policies of occupation and violence: "I invite you to come live with us to see our conditions and see how we live. The crimes are beyond description! Killing bombardments-demolitions! In front of our home a car with two people inside was attacked by missiles. That made [Ayat] go mad!" She tells Abigail that her daughter had seen people killed in front of her own home. She continues to emphasize the hardships of Palestinian life such as her inability to travel, the curfew, her life in a camp, and the threatened demolition of her home. Abigail calls Um Samir's contextualizations too "political" and renders the dialogue a failure. This strange allotment of the "political" as external to or somehow detrimental to "womanhood" dialogue assumes that "womanhood" is an apolitical concept and ultimately has the effect of erasing the contexts and stories that Palestinian women insist on.



On Saturday January 17, 2009, a prominent woman journalist from Gaza posted a poem by Safiyya Abdullah on a blog entitled “Gaza Mom: Motherhood, Politics, Palestine and Everything in Between.” The poem, called “Sound Bites,” challenges the parceling of a lengthy, complex history of colonization into discrete “events:” “We watch TV and think that someone’s week/that is 168 hours, which is 10,080 minutes,/ weed that down to 36 minutes/ (after time out for commercials)/ is the whole story.../” She goes on: “Slaves to the sound bites [...] we watch it fervently” and she claims that the audience is “never taking the time [...] to find out what is behind/ these sound bites” (Abdullah qtd in El-Haddad). Abdullah responds to these sound-bites with “soundbites of [her] own”:

Most populated real estate on the face of the earth: Gaza/ Sound Bite:/  
50% of the population under 18/ Sound Bite:/ 52% of the population lives  
below poverty./ And that was 18 months ago,/ before the economic  
embargo/ Sound bite:/ This densely populated area is walled off on all  
sides,/ preventing materials, food, supplies, and people from getting in or  
out. (Abdullah qtd. in El-Haddad)

Abdullah adds to this contextualization by framing a day in the life of Gazans later in the poem:

DAY ONE:/ Sound Bite:/ Lunchtime shopping/ Kids coming home from  
school/ Sister across the street had a miscarriage/ Because there wasn’t  
enough food to eat.../ Funeral yesterday...cousin died of dysentery/ No  
medicine shipments in a month of Sundays/ Bread lines 13 hours long/  
Sound Bite:/ Zainab, mother of 3, boiling water/ To soak the peas, make  
the tea,/ and soften the day old bread for her daughter [...] WHOOSH!  
BANG!/ Sound Bite:/ Zainab flies across the room.../sits up in a daze/  
[...] What was the cause of that blast?/ Another follows and wails begin/  
while mothers pour out in the streets and holler/ their children’s names/  
Searching streets for children who/ were just playing games [...] or  
standing in line waiting for water or fuel/ WHOOSH! BANG! [...] Here  
comes more missiles once again.” (El-Haddad)

Abdullah goes on to describe a stifling day two, three and four of a “long life of occupation.” Her revelation of daily life in Gaza is performed in an effort to get the reader to “find the courage/ to enter the soundstage/ and stop listening to sound bites.” Laila El-Haddad, the author of the blog who posted this poem, lives in Gaza and spends any time she can spare giving her readers a picture of daily life in Palestine; her stories include the daily-ness of raising two children, what they cooked that day and what work she’s doing, along with important details of the occupation. The mundane, in Palestinian popular culture, academia and literature, is not separated from the occupation because the occupation affects every aspect of Palestinian life.

Judith Butler argues for the need to situate Israeli “national security discourses” within the contextualized story of Palestinian life. She reminds her readers that the repetition of the initial injury of the *Nakba*, which dislocated 700,000 Palestinians at the time that Israel was founded, has created a violent and dehumanizing basis for state formation. This repetition obscured under the guise of separate events, “repeats its founding gesture in the containment and dehumanization of Palestinians in the occupied territories” (*Precarious* 119). The separation of these repeated moments of traumatic violence into discrete and exceptional moments is a central strategy of Israeli state rationalization, and its appearance in Israeli feminist discourse makes it impossible for Palestinian women to welcome such discourse.

### **The Effects of Narrative Appropriation: Interrogating Palestinian Women**

Thus far in this chapter I have outlined the ways in which hegemonic Israeli narratives of Palestinian-Israeli history which fragments a broader occupation into a series of exceptional emergency events, seeps into the work of Israeli feminist activists. I have shown that, as a result, Palestinian-Israeli feminist dialogue is compromised even while Palestinian women continue to try to counter Israeli narratives by placing them in a longer context. Despite these efforts, Israeli narratives such as “Cast Lead” dominated the media in the world’s largest military superpower countries and allies of Israel (such as the UK and the United States). Such countries have unquestionably strong abilities to *enact* their stories through military operations. For example, if Hamas is considered to be an initiator in violence, the Western countries will support attacks on Hamas. As these narratives of “war” and “resultant” Israeli violence appear in Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues, Palestinian women are placed in the position of continually defending themselves in similar ways as Um Samir and Abdo do in their respective dialogues, outlined earlier in this dissertation. Consequently, Palestinian women become frustrated that asymmetries in power or feminist principles of (un)just power relations are not comprehended in these dialogues and they feel “the whole pyramid is upside down.”

*“We were put in the Accusation Corner”*

In interviews, many women intimated to me that they felt like they were “put in the accusation corner” (Jad) when they participated in Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogue groups. A group of women I interviewed in Hebron recall one particular experience when they, one day, daringly decided to walk through a mall in West Jerusalem, at a time when they were able to physically cross into West Jerusalem before the wall was erected. They describe being approached tentatively by Israeli women who asked if they could speak with them. In broken translation the Israeli women began the conversation with a question: “Why do you send your children into the streets to throw stones at our soldiers and sons?” When recounting this story to me, the Palestinian women express their shock at the Israeli women’s choice of an ordinary point of events. In response, the Palestinian women say they described their everyday realities to the Israeli women. They divulged stories about middle-of-the-night house raids by IDF/IOF soldiers and the fear it instills in their children; the lack of control they feel when their sons and neighbours’ sons are taken as political prisoners in front of the community by the IDF/IOF; the psychological and physical violence they endure on a daily basis trying to cross checkpoints; the constant harassment and stress of life in refugee camps (when the IDF/IOF shoots holes in home-water tanks, for example) and so on. The Palestinian women tell me that after recounting stories about their lives in broken English and Hebrew, the Israeli women began to cry

and said: “We didn’t know!” The Palestinian women look at me with incredulity at the possibility that Israeli women were not aware of these realities. “How could they not know?” the Palestinian women from Hebron ask each other. While these Palestinian women from Hebron express a sense of satisfaction that they conveyed their realities to the unaware Israeli women, they simultaneously express a deep frustration and shock at being *questioned* as the violent actor by the Israeli women in the first place.

Moreover, the women say that they felt a kind of imposition of a narrow definition of “motherhood” which holds many assumptions. The accusatory questions targeted the Palestinian women’s mothering practices, implying that they were somehow inadequate as mothers because their children throw stones at soldiers. The Israeli women’s accusations—and this is a repeated and common experience as articulated by many Palestinian interviewees—seemed to imply to the Palestinian women that if they were better mothers, they could mitigate the negative effects of the occupation on their children and the men in their lives. In a society where public space is an extension of the home, Palestinian women explained to me that it was impossible to hide the injustices of the occupation from their children (e.g. when a playground or home is demolished nearby). Mothers explain that they would warn their children against throwing stones, or getting into dangerous situations, over and over again but that they had little control over such a volatile situation in which children were angry. Moreover, the concept that there might be a safe space to contain and control the children (say,

the home) simply wouldn't apply as the occupation and its policies of terror and violence pervade the domestic, private space. This encounter at the mall, in which there is a temporal limit on the initiating violence, with a narrowly woman-centred premise, parallels the dialogue in *To Die*.

The effects of such logics have dire material effects on Palestinian women's lives. For example, Abigail casually says that she has heard Israel might demolish Um Samir's home and she asks why Israel *shouldn't* demolish Um Samir's (Ayat's mother's) house. The demolition of the Palestinian's house, in this scenario, is both framed and understood as resultant or retributive violence. In truth, house demolitions occur frequently and indiscriminately for the purposes of Jewish settlement and evictions, such as in the contemporary Silwan case.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the fact that Um Samir lives in a refugee camp means that her house has already been taken from her, long before Ayat's bombing. Furthermore, the "collective" punishment of an entire family or community for the crimes of an individual would be unacceptable in other foreign situations, as collective punishment is positioned as "outside" of modern judicial practices.

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<sup>96</sup> In " 'Quiet Transfer' in East Jerusalem nears Completion" Elodie Guego offers a brief historical overview of Israel's slow and steady strategies to "Judaise" the city. These strategies include revoking residency permits, building the wall to exile Palestinian refugee camps from Jerusalem and prevent the return of Palestinians who go to the West Bank, implementing the "Town Planning Scheme" which restricts Palestinians' abilities to build homes in already built up areas, as well as, the "Center of Life Policy" which requires Palestinians to prove that they continuously lived and worked in Jerusalem for the preceding seven years which has become difficult to prove even for Palestinians "who have never left Jerusalem" because "the standard of proof demanded is so rigorous" (Guego 26-27).

It is important to note that there are some radical anti-Zionist feminist writings that critique this questioning of the Palestinian woman. Even Ronit Lentin, whose contribution to the dialogue with Abdo has been critiqued in the previous chapter “deplore[s] the self-appointed ‘feminist’ critics for blaming Palestinian mothers for allegedly sending their children to the front line, and implicitly for their children’s murder by the Israelis” (Abdo and Lentin 22). However, such perspectives are not evident in the actions of Israeli feminist movements, nor do they structure the foundations of Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues. It is true that Lentin has some importantly critical moments in the dialogue with Abdo, but when talking responses to Israeli independence day celebrations she describes Israeli violence against Palestinians but then states that “there were also several car bombs [by Palestinians] and the *resultant* house demolitions and air raids” (Abdo and Lentin 19, my emphasis). While Lentin may have meant “literally” resultant as Israel tries to punish the families of the bombers, there is the risk that this language is incorporated into the sense of cyclical violence in which Israelis and Palestinians are always *responding* to each other. Israeli violence (the ongoing creation of settlements and the ensuing violence towards and displacements of Palestinians as well as indiscriminate shootings at arbitrarily delineated borders or checkpoints, for example) is not, in its primary form, a *resultant* violence. It is a violence that continues to repeat itself whether or not Palestinians are actively resisting the occupation. Moreover, the logic of house demolitions as a legitimate response to Palestinian violence—

that is the rationalization of collective punishment—appears normalized here. The risks of using such language as Israeli “resultant” violence are high for Palestinians’ lives. This is an instance of the way that the hegemonic Israeli Orientalist discourse still recurs within Israeli feminist discourse even if the latter has progressively critical intentions. Indeed Israeli left movements including feminist movements as shown above, use this language of exceptionalism and “resultant” violence ubiquitously. Indeed the Orientalist discourse which works to hide the colonial underpinnings of the conflict is powerful.

Ghada Sughayar argues that during “the last Israeli aggression against Gaza strip,” some statements made by internationals and Israelis put “Gaza’s people and Israel on an equal footing.” Sughayar explains that mainstream narratives of this offensive made it sound as though “the Israeli aggression came *as a result* of the launching of missiles against the Israeli citizens, innocent citizens etc.” Sughayar further explains that many donors, NGOs and foreign governments from Europe or the United States “have encouraged” dialogue groups, “thinking that this can bridge the differences between the Palestinians and the Israelis and can heal a little bit...heal the *il ghrouh* [the pain] caused by this long conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis.” But she explains:

The victims and those who are occupying and those who are aggressive and who are really practicing all types of racism, oppression against the Palestinians and violence against the Palestinians are dealt in the same manner and on an equal footing by the donors.



Sughayar further explicates, that “in many cases we heard statements by the EU” that positioned Israeli violence as “reacting” to Palestinian violence. Sughayar explains “these reasons were, for me, very strong reasons for rejecting such types of initiatives or projects [dialogue or joint activities] between the Palestinians and the Israelis.” Sughayar rejects narrations of “resultant” Israeli violence because they distort the reality of the ongoing displacements of Palestinians. As a result, she supports the boycott of Israeli and Palestinian women’s dialogues, even though she strongly advocated for them and created them in the 1990s.

Amneh Badran, another previous member of the Jerusalem Center for Women (the Palestinian part of the Jerusalem Link), and author of *Sharing Jerusalem: Two Capitals for Two States*, argues that it is “urgent” for Israeli and Palestinian women to “continue to work together.” Concurrently, however, she writes in the Arab newspaper *Al Quds*: “We need trust and transparency to work at building relations based on equality. We can’t have it without an end to the Occupation. As it is now, there is asymmetry: occupied and occupier...” (Badran, qtd. in Powers 8). Islah Jad argues that the missing language of colonial aggression produces an equalization that “marginalize[s] the factor of power” and of “power relations.” Magnus Ranstorp, a scholar of Israeli-Palestinian peace processes, argues:

The asymmetric nature of the conflict with Israel, the militarily superior partner, has reduced the very essence of the conflict to control—over

security, the economy, and the movement of people. For the Israelis peace essentially means security, while for the Palestinians it revolves around addressing the justice element and the restoration of legitimate rights. (Ranstorp 246)

Ranstorp talks about “real” structural inequalities: Israeli closures hit the Palestinian economy and community hard: “these repeated closures led to a sharp rise in unemployment, combined with a fiscal crisis due to the withholding of taxes collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority” (254). Moreover, Israeli policies have led to the impoverishment of Palestinians (Ranstorp 254). Within a context of such severe inequality dialogue may not be possible. As explored in the introduction, dialogue requires fair conditions and it is important to consider whether fair dialogue is *possible* in a colonial setting. If dialogues continue to persist with no address of colonial relations, however, what are their functions and how do they operate? The next chapter will explore the role of dialogue in a colonial setting and its possibilities for either entrenching the occupation or attaining justice and peace.

## Chapter Five: Palestinian Women Break the Silences in Dialogue

*“It is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence.” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 44)*

Today, Palestinian women call for a widespread formal and informal boycott of Israeli-Palestinian women’s peace dialogues. Informally, Palestinian women have shared their experiences in these dialogues with each other, reflecting on what they have (and have not) accomplished, and the boycott has spread through word of mouth. Formally, some Palestinian women (and men), including Islah Jad, have authored a set of criteria for the Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) boycott campaign (which co-founded the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement) by creating a “Women’s Brochure” (see Appendix A for the original document). The women’s boycott guidelines are similar to those seen on the PACBI website.<sup>97</sup> The brochure’s English introduction traces the trajectory of and lessons learned from feminist activities between “the West” and Palestine. Echoing many historians, the brochure explains that during the first *intifada* and onward, many Palestinians were invited to meet with Israelis: there was “great support and encouragement from Western countries aimed at bringing Palestinians and Israelis together to the

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<sup>97</sup> For more on the PACBI movement see the “Introduction” to this dissertation as well as <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1436&key=dialogue> for information on “joint” activity and dialogue guidelines. More generally, the PACBI website is [www.pacbi.org](http://www.pacbi.org).

‘dialogue’ meetings and ‘to break the psychological barriers’ between the parties.”

For women, according to the brochure, there was a call from Israelis and Westerners to overcome “national masculine identities” and find “common feminist denominators.” The brochure argues that such feminist meetings focused on “attracting active women in the national movement [...] to focus on criticizing ‘nationalism and masculine chauvinism’” and gestures to some of the critiques of such dialogues (such as that they “were usually focused on the real-time [sic] or indeed the future,” asking participants to “avoid the past ‘and its consequences.’”) Then the brochure, more rigorously, explains the premises of these dialogues as well as Palestinian women’s experiences in such dialogues in Arabic. The brochure begins by outlining various “false assumptions” upon which these “joint ventures were based”.<sup>98</sup>

- 1- Women are the first to suffer from wars and their calamities. Israeli woman lose their sons to the war while Palestinian women’s life prerequisites are destroyed by the “male dominated violence” from both parties in addition to losing their sons.
- 2- “Digging out history”—particularly the history of the Zionist movement—is useless; what is more feasible is focussing on the present to prevent the fall of more victims and to stop the suffering of the grieving mothers in both sides.
- 3- Allowing women to enter the arena of negotiations and politics will help more than the role of men in reaching more humanitarian and practical

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<sup>98</sup> The following is translated by Rasool Daban (Member of the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario and Affiliate Member of the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council). I have not corrected grammatical and spelling mistakes from the translation or inserted “[sic]” to indicate my awareness of them because there are too many and the corrections would become distracting.

solutions due to “women’s natural inclination for peace and aversion of violence”

- 4- Nationalism, be it Jewish or Palestinian, emerged on the bases of oppressing women; it took advantage of them and marginalized their role in the society in order to highlight the control and manhood of men. This “joint oppression” forms a common ground for women from both sides.
- 5- Women—all women—are one in both sides. Their sufferings are one and reasons of their oppression are one.
- 6- Those meetings, which are often intensively covered by the mass media, point to the fact that “women work together” and it is preferable “from the Western point of view” to encourage both parties to work together instead of the “useless” condemnation and attack of the Israeli policy.
- 7- The “neutral” Western side should help both parties “break the psychological barriers” and “get to know the other and share its feelings” instead of letting each side be ostracized in its position.
- 8- The Palestinian side boycotted a lot of meetings with the Israelis and it got nothing out of this; it would be better for us to get involved to submit our view point and defend it.

Thus, the brochure highlights some of the workings of international women’s peace dialogues and calls such assumptions “inaccuracies” which “are not based on the foundations supported by fact or history, not only in Palestine but in many world countries that were colonized.” The brochure responds to these assumptions thus:

- 1- A lot of women[‘s] experiences in the Third World countries that suffered from colonialism have proved that man-led national movements were the first to push women to get involved in politics and work in the public interest in opposing and resisting colonialism.
- 2- To enhance women’s role in the nationalistic movements, men’s role should be backed, women’s education be encouraged, and women should leave their homes to work (calls by Qasim Amin and Saad Zaghloul in Egypt and Haj Amin Alhusaini, Izzudeen Alqasam and Akram Zaiter in Palestine) and consequently those movements were not suppressing and taking advantage of women but they were liberators and promoters of most of them.
- 3- A distinction should be made between a colonial nationalistic movement and another under the control of colonialism. It is true that there are men in both sides but there is a difference between an attacking party and an

- attacked party. The attacker does not differentiate between women and men and even children.
- 4- Like men, women are not a homogenous block in all countries suffering from the same problems and dreaming of the same hopes. Women are different according to their national, ethnic and class affiliations. Consequently, there is a nationalistic difference between (an occupying Israeli woman and a Palestinian woman under the control of colonialism). There is also a class difference between an urban wealthy woman and a poor refugee one.
  - 5- Although some nationalistic movements are male-dominated, their oppression of women does not compare to the level of nationalistic oppression which inflicts destruction on all although it often boasts of working to “liberate women”. We have an old example to this effect in Palestine and another recent one in Iraq.
  - 6- Aversion of any mention of the past, in the Palestinian case specifically, is related to the desire to avoid discussing that past’s consequences and ramifications that are still present such as the issue of the refugees, the right to repatriation and compensation according to the United Nations’ resolution No. 194.
  - 7- Before the spread of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the state of Israel, the Arabs and the Jews did not suffer from any significant psychological or ethnic barriers. What created these barriers is the uprooting colonialist Zionist policy which has not changed until today.

The first component of the brochure outlines Western assumptions about Palestinian women’s lives and the premises upon which the dialogues were based (namely the “West’s” temporal focus on the present and the future, the concept of a homogeneous womanhood and the wholesale dismissal of nationalism). Interestingly, these critiques are reflected in “Cast Lead” communications between Israeli and Palestinian women, in *To Die*, and in the academic exchange between Abdo and Lentin, respectively.<sup>99</sup> The brochure also points out a Western pressure to focus on the “personal” rather than the political to break

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<sup>99</sup> In the case of the Abdo and Lentin dialogue, it is arguable that the more “base” political allegiance became nationalism, although Lentin did not call this a preoccupation with the “political.”

“psychological barriers” (a pressure evident, for example, in the film *To Die in Jerusalem*, when Abigail declares Um Samir “too political” when she talks about the Israeli occupation, a matter that is quite *personal* to Um Samir, and instead asks her to focus on motherhood, a topic conventionally and more widely understood as more “personal”). The second half of the brochure theorizes its own anti-colonial feminism by critiquing these premises and pointing to many differences between the aforementioned Western feminist assumptions and Palestinian women’s experiences.

After briefly outlining their own gendered experiences under Israeli occupation, the authors of the brochure set up a flow chart for Palestinian women to follow in the event they are invited to participate in a dialogue meeting. The flow chart asks its readers a question and their answer then leads them to a subsequent question or answer about whether they should “boycott” or participate.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> This flow chart was only available in Arabic. It is translated by Rasool Daban (Member of the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario and Affiliate Member of the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council). Grammatical mistakes were left, true to the translation.

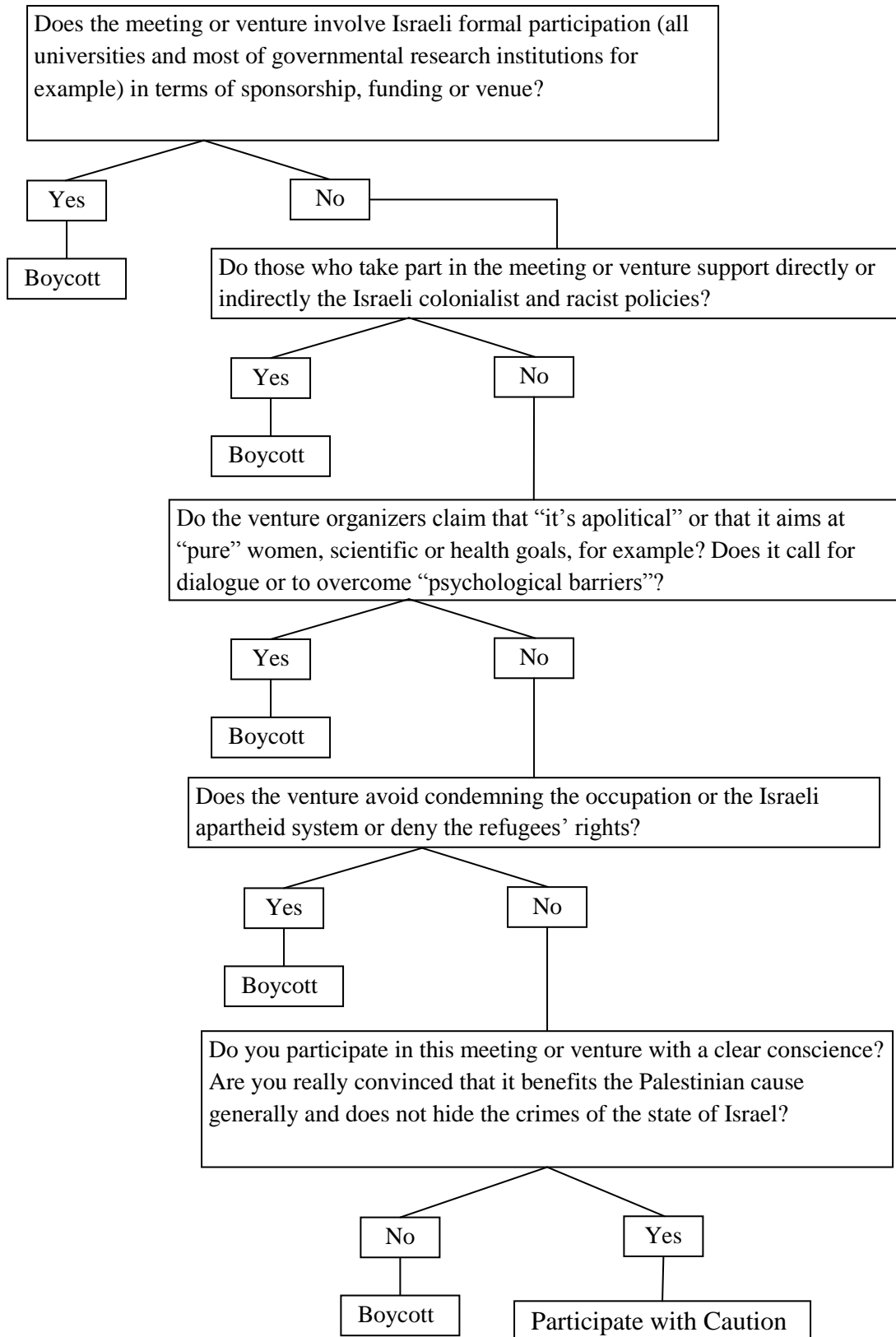




Figure Twelve: PACBI Women's Brochure  
(Translated by Rasool Daban)

This flow chart reveals Palestinians' suspicions of the ultimate goals of Israeli-Palestinian women's peace dialogues but also reveals that the process of deliberation about dialogues is fairly robust and in-depth. Rather than an outright "boycott all dialogue" statement, the women are invited to use the flow chart to make their decisions. There remains room for subjective answers and debate. In fact, there are lively debates in Palestine and in the diaspora about answers to such questions, even if there appears to be a comprehensive boycott in the West Bank. Nonetheless, the suspicion revealed in these questions is overt.

The Women's Brochure is often described as antithetical to peace as liberal paradigms of peace often equate dialogue, any dialogue and even business/free trade dialogues, with peacemaking (Selby). Feminist groups in Israel and other parts of the Western world have expressed a deep discomfort with Palestinian women's refusal to dialogue with Israeli women. In fact, I received a hostile reception from Israeli and non-Israeli women (including feminist panelists) at the *Middle Eastern Studies Association* conference in 2007 when I relayed some of the interview passages (included in chapter one) from Palestinian women. A Jewish audience member said this was a kind of anti-Semitic hate speech and Israeli-Jewish co-panelists were concerned about the "negativity" and seemingly anti-peace stance of such political positions. Similarly, leaders of the

boycott campaign in general, like Omar Barghouti, are repeatedly asked whether or not “dialogue is more constructive than boycotts” (Mustafa).

While this Women’s Brochure has been removed from the PACBI website (for unknown reasons), it was recently posted by an Israel-based website called *MidEastWeb* as part of an article entitled, “Perverting Middle East Dialogue: The Subversion Program of the Enemies of Middle East Peace.” Ami Isseroff, the Israeli Executive Secretary of *MidEastWeb for Coexistence* and editor of *PeaceWatch*, warns that “‘Anti-Israel boycott’ groups are subverting dialogue and cooperation programs to prevent a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” He asserts that “Dialogue and Cooperation organizations should be leading the fight against the boycotters.” Isseroff further argues that such a boycott is a way to “wreck” Israeli and Palestinian dialogue and a way to “delegitimize the Israeli state.” Such declarations equate the boycott of dialogue with an affront to the “existence” of Israel or with being “anti-Israel” (and by implication, anti-Semitic). In other words, statements like these posit a binarized dichotomy between the boycott and peace.

The following sections will trouble the equation of boycott with anti-peace by troubling the equation of dialogue with peace. My argument is that the boycott of these status-quo colonial dialogues calls for the *production* of “ethical” dialogue between the participants as equals which, in the views of the authors of this brochure and the Palestinian interviewees, has more potential to create peace.

Furthermore, the following section will show how silence can be an intrinsic part of (colonial and feminist) dialogues. Indeed, while silence is often associated with a lack of communication, when Audre Lorde writes “it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence” in *Sister Outsider* (44), she speaks of the silences that work through and within dialogue. She speaks of the silences that emerge in the erasure of overwriting of *others*’ narratives. It is important to note that Palestinian women still engage in the very few dialogues that “pass” through the criteria chart and emerge as “anti-colonial” so they are not—in principle—totally anti-dialogue. Many interviewees indicate a lost hope for past dialogues and express hopes that this boycott of colonial dialogues will produce a new space where women from all over the world, including Israel, can connect based on the multitude of ways oppression is experienced by the female body (rape, sexual assault, incest, poverty, immobility, military violence, racism, disability, etc.). Palestinian women, in fact, still have an interest in international dialogues with other women, but they have come to argue that the current genre of dialogues were tragically part of the colonial process and were imbued with “silences” or erasures about difference. This chapter shows how silence and dialogue are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I employ Lorde’s work to show how silence has had historically precedential roles in feminist dialogues. Briefly using recognition theory, I explore further how this silence—which works through erasures—is not simply a mistake but an essential component of the colonial process which

requires that, according to Bhabha, the colonized person never becomes “quite white” (“Of Mimicry” 33).

This chapter argues that the silences of colonial dialogues—and the ensuing ways in which requests of the colonized person to bridge those silences through concessions to dominant discourse—become torturously cyclical endeavours which are enduringly constrained by the initial dehumanization project that *requires* that the colonized remain “not wholly human” (Bhabha “Of Mimicry” 126). For some, such requests for dialogue, at their worst, work to distract the colonized person from liberatory activism, keeping them engaged with bargaining for their humanization. Therefore the dialogue imperative—as it stands in Israel and Palestine—actually becomes part of the colonial process. Finally, I explore the radical power Palestinian women’s bodies have exerted in re-articulating power relations between Israeli and Palestinian women when they try to break out of the dialectic of colonizer-recognizer and colonized-seeking-recognition, the effects of which remain to be seen.

### **Silences in Dialogue**

*“He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps perpetuate it.”* Martin Luther King Jr.

In exploring the roles of silence in dialogue I employ Audre Lorde’s writings on silence with regards to the American feminist movement in the 1980s.

I argue, ultimately, that silence can be a component of dialogue and sometimes boycotting dialogue is paradoxically a refusal of silencing. In the 1980s and 1990s, Audre Lorde (a lesbian American feminist “of Color”) defined silence as the absences in hegemonic discourse. Lorde argued that the absence of “considerations of difference” such as “race, sexuality, class, and age [...] weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political” (*Sister* 110). She argued that “white American feminist theory” did not, at the time of writing, deal with “the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions,” and she called therefore for further theorizing on “racist feminism.” For Lorde, feminist discussions were happening everywhere with all kinds of absences and silences: indeed, during the Second Sex Conference (at which she was presenting a paper in 1979) she critiqued the conference for an “absence of any consideration of lesbian consciousness or the consciousness of Third World women” (111). For Lorde, silence is not simply the absence of speech or the act of not speaking—it can actually manifest in unbearably loud speech—it is instead a complicity with normalized speech and thus repeatedly effects erasure. Lorde argues that such forms of silencing and “silent dialogues” require racialized women to “swallow” tyrannies “day by day [...] attempt[ing] to make [them] your own, until you [...] sicken and die of them, still in silence” (*Sister* 42).

In “The Ethical Space of Engagement,” Willie Ermine calls attention to the “ethical space” which is formed when “two societies [...] are poised to engage each other” (193). For Ermine, it is the space between people (i.e. between

“Indigenous peoples and Western society”) that “contributes to the development of a framework for dialogue between human communities” (193). Ermine draws on an image in Roger Poole’s *Towards Deep Subjectivity* to show that cooperation or acknowledgement can live in harmony with deep and pervasive silences. To illustrate this space, Poole presents a photograph that dates to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia:

In the picture, two men are sitting on a park bench looking at each other. One man is dressed in army fatigues and is clearly representative of the dominant and occupying force, while the other man, dressed in civilian, peasant clothing, clearly represents one of the ‘occupied.’ The space between them is what intrigued Poole. On the surface, the presence of the other is acknowledged, but it is space between people, at the unstated, unseen level of thought and feeling that is overwhelming in the picture. Poole directs our focus to that space and invites us to reflect on the electrifying nature of that area between entities that we thought was empty. (Ermine 194-5)

That space occurs, according to Ermine, “whenever and wherever the physical and philosophical encounter of Indigenous and Western worlds takes place” (195). While it looks like the two entities are facing each other, each able to look at the other in the face, the “deeper level thoughts, interests and assumptions that will inevitably influence and animate the kind of relationship the two can have” remain “hidden” (195). What is hidden is the discursive constraints which make dialogue (im)possible. When I look at this space between the military man and the civilian man I wonder: Who has called the meeting? What are the background or “hidden” thoughts of the participants? Who can ask questions? Who can answer? Who can leave and who cannot? Who decides when the dialogue is over?

What fears and consequences make up the ethical space of the image? Most importantly, whose narratives, realities and stories in this photo have the (material, political and economic) ability (or privilege) to effect reality? These questions are pertinent in a consideration of (the silences in) Israeli-Palestinian dialogues and require more deliberation.

### **My Experiences with Ethical Space in Israel and Palestine**

I think of various dialogues I encountered during my research trips in the West Bank wherein the question of ethical space between two people became disturbingly present. More specifically, I recall driving to the small town of Aseera with four male cousins who were picking me up from a main checkpoint in Nablus. We crammed into one car and began driving back to where they lived in Aseera. We needed to go through a mandatory checkpoint to get into or out of their hometown.<sup>101</sup> We waited for an hour and half in the summer heat, and I was warned by my relatives not to attempt to get out of the car for fresh air because it would arouse suspicion and potentially provoke gunfire. Pulling up to the checkpoint, my cousin, the driver, collected and handed the IDF/IOF soldier our five passports. I was sitting in the middle of the backseat which meant I was not easily visible to the soldier. When he bent down to look inside the car, he seemed disinterested until he abruptly put out his hand as if to make sure the vehicle

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<sup>101</sup> Many students make this trip twice daily to go to university in Nablus.

would not move. He smiled and started laughing and then called to other soldiers in Hebrew who were processing the other checkpoint stops. Pointing to me, he said “you! Get out of the car,” in broken English. One of my cousins, laughing nervously, told me, “Oh, they just want to have some fun with you because you’re not wearing a hijab. Don’t be scared.” Once out of the car, approximately five soldiers proceeded to abandon long line-ups of waiting Palestinians and collected around me. They were smiling in a friendly manner and from an outside perspective it may have looked as though we were simply acquainting ourselves with each other. The space between us, however, shaped the way I would answer their questions:

Soldier #1: “You’re from Canada?”

Me: “Yes”

Soldier (smiling and leaning in): “So does that mean you speak French?”

Me: “A little”

Soldier (laughing): “Okay! Say something in French”

Me: “Bonjour”

Soldier (laughing): “Say more! Come on.”

I looked back into the car and I saw my four cousins sitting there, curious, but still. They would look quickly and then nervously look away so as, it seemed, not to bother the soldiers. Some were staring ahead, some were trying to peak at me but all were behaving nervously. A sniper pointed at the car from above, but the soldiers returned my passport, gesturing that everything was okay. Yet the dialogue ensued, and I could not leave. I was shackled by the way they had hailed me to engage them, for I knew my passport could be taken at any moment:



Soldier: “So what are you doing here?”

Me: “Visiting family”

Soldier (smiling): “How come you don’t wear hijab?”

Me: “Not every Muslim wears one.”

Soldier (laughing): “Why would you ever come here? Why would you come all the way from beautiful Canada to this dreadful place?”

Me: “I have family here.”

Soldier: “But you know the people that live in this town are terrorists. They are trouble.”

Me: “I want to see my relatives. I love this place.”

I knew during this conversation that if they were to become violent, they would not be held accountable since this space is considered a “war zone” by my Canadian government (which states clearly on its website that they do not recommend travel to this region and cannot protect Canadian citizens who enter this space). Thinking of my aunt, whom I was longing to see, and not wanting to be denied entry (which they could do without an explanation), I felt paralyzed. On another level, I was also aware that I could leave and go back to Canada if I wanted to, but my cousins live here, and if their names were associated with “trouble” (or a non-complacent Palestinian) they would have an even harder time with mobility and freedom in the West Bank. They might even become victims of soldier violence which is largely unaccountable to any state laws. These were the “hidden thoughts” and conditions which composed the space between us.

Nevertheless, I tried to “talk back,” drawing on my privileged ability to go back to Canada and on the fact that I was being perceived to be more “western” and therefore dialogue-able than my cousins who were only shouted at and ignored.

Me: “Why are you asking me why I’m here?”

Soldier: “Because this place is awful.”

Me: “Well then why are *you* here?”

Soldier (face turns slightly into a furrowed brow): “What do you mean? I am from here.”

Me: “Were you born here? Where are your parents from?”

Soldier (getting visibly agitated and dismissive): “Don’t worry. I am from here.”

Me (giggling nervously): “Well we’re both here so this place can’t be all that bad, right!? It’s beautiful isn’t it?”

[Soldier waves me away with a furrowed face and the rest of the soldiers disperse back to their line-ups]

While “talking back,” I was hot, sweaty and inwardly terrified. Asking those simple questions (which might constitute a dialogue) risked leaving hundreds of cars still waiting (some with babies inside) or closing down a checkpoint as can and has happened according to soldiers’ moods and whims. I could neither respond the way I wanted (for example by refusing to answer irrelevant questions like whether I can speak French) nor could I walk away. I could not contest the use of the word “terrorists” and was only able to implicitly gesture to the soldier’s foreign lineage and desire to settle in the region. As for my part in this dialogue, such were the “hidden thoughts” between me and the soldiers comprising the ethical tensions of our shared space between repressive state apparatuses and those who are interpellated by them. My experience was unique and different from that of a resident Palestinian for various reasons, including the fact that I do not wear a hijab and I have a Canadian passport. In Israel, however, the discursive interpellation by the army guard’s “hey you!” which calls an Arab (even a “foreign” Arab from North America) into a consensual subjection is immediately

backed up, or even replaced by, the threat of an indiscriminate shooting or beating without accountability (as is documented by *B'Tselem*) (Dudai).<sup>102</sup>

In a similar example, when I was entering Israel and Palestine from Jordan, the Israeli checkpoint guards at the Allenby Bridge asked me to fill out a form which reads: When will you be leaving Israel? Why are you visiting Israel? After filling out the form, I was asked the same oral questions. When once I verbally used the term Palestine to respond (i.e. my family lives in Palestine, meaning they live in Tul Karem in the West Bank), perhaps out of habit, the soldier retorted, “There is no Palestine! Show me Palestine on a map!” It was as though I had failed a test – I was told to wait. Over the next twelve hours I waited while many others passed through. I watched as “white” tourists going to the Holy City were treated with hospitality and let through within minutes. In the meanwhile, I was questioned repeatedly privately and publicly. When I was eventually allowed to pass, the checkpoint was closing and all the public transportation to Jerusalem had ceased for the day.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> For the guards this dialogue may have worked to re-anchor their *raison d'être*, proving that if only Arabs were more *moderate* or *Westernized* they would be dialogue-able. My cousins (one of whom is an English professor in a university in Jenin) who were not allowed to leave the car are simply non-dialogue-able, plainly because, as the IDF/IOF warned me in a whispering tone, “they are terrorists.” The soldiers attempted to forge an alliance with me against “them” (primarily based on my proximity to “civilization” through my unveiling, citizenship and language).

<sup>103</sup> A fellow traveler who was waiting with me at one point told a Taxi driver to wait for me just outside the checkpoint, as they witnessed how I was being held longer than everyone else. While I was thankful for the ride, the taxi cost about

On my next trip to Palestine I did not use the term Palestine even in conjunction with the term Israel. To make this bargain I would be making a discursive concession—indeed quite a significant one—but if I did not, I might be giving up access to a childhood home and a place in which I have a citizenship-in-process through an application that my father filled out when I was two years old and based on his own citizenship. The dialogue here, then, the exchange of discourse, is one of strategy under duress—indeed, a forced speech-act which required the discursive erasure of Palestine.

These discursive concessions are made every day in Israel and Palestine. During a trip to Al-Aqsa Mosque, for example, in order to enter, I was told to get rid of a feminist poster for IWD that had a small Palestinian flag on it. When I asked the soldier why, he initially said it was because these types of symbols cause trouble in this area. When probed further he said “because there is no Palestine” and “that flag does not exist.” I had to find a nearby store that would hold the poster, but everyone was nervous to accept it. The soldier would watch and see who would take it. Because accepting the poster might suggest they are “radicals,” their hesitancy seemed motivated by fear of possible retaliation. Such discursive concessions seem necessary every day, and they have very real

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\$100 USD while the bus would have cost me \$20 USD. Had this taxi not waited for me, I would have been stranded in an otherwise abandoned desert terrain in between the hills of Jewish settlements. It is a largely uninhabited area, except for the settlers and stray animals. The taxi driver had to rush home for dinner with his family in Jerusalem. If I was held back for another reason, besides my discursive slippage, I will never know. Although I asked repeatedly throughout the day why I was being held back, I received no answer.

consequences. At almost every checkpoint I could see my family or other Palestinians I became acquainted with in line put on a smiling face when it was their turn to approach the checkpoint guard. They would try to make jokes in Hebrew, be very polite, and thank the soldiers for their help. But before and after these encounters they would curse their very presence. Some would say “Allah ysamih-kom”: in English, God forgive you.<sup>104</sup>

These interrogatory dialogues at checkpoints and borders, whether they are disguised as dialogues between paternalistic guards who are guarding you (a potentially “good” Arab) from your neighbour’s terrorism, or whether they are explicit in their discursive erasures and colonial undertakings mirror the eastward interrogatory structure of many Israeli-Palestinian feminist dialogues. The

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<sup>104</sup> The performance aspect of dialoguing on the part of Palestinians is a survival strategy. *Checkpoint* is a documentary which recounts a variety of these encounters, ranging from a woman enduring sexual harassment by giggling while stealthily also walking slowly through the gate hoping that the soldier’s distracted nature will ensure her access today, to a man pleading for access to his fiancée’s house by implicitly appealing to their common identity, as young men, wanting to please girlfriends. While the groom seems to be joking around with the soldier, trying to win his graces so that he may deliver henna to his bride the night before their wedding, the invisible power disparity (and the repression of Palestinian anger at the unjust and arbitrary road closures) in dialogue is choking for a Palestinian audience and their sympathizers. The logic of road closures and curfews are frustratingly arbitrary. The ways in which Palestinians appeal to the Israeli’s sensibilities, their sense of logic, and their language (by speaking in Hebrew) operates in a way that allows Palestinians to navigate strict restrictions on their lives. They use persuasion, humour and kindness in insincere ways to get basic access to their communities, ambulances, hospitals, and schools. Thus dialogue with the state or with power becomes a kind of performance, and subcultures of dialogue are formed between those who must strategize to navigate the dialogical terrain and those who are determining the dialogue.

erasures and silences, as well as unspoken fears and presumed guiltiness in the above examples of “dialogue” create forms of “civil” interrogation that parallel the dynamics in Israeli-Palestinian peace dialogues (recall the erasures of the Jerusalem Link’s Palestinian contributions to statements, or the interrogatory questions posed to Jad, Sughayar and Um Samir about their children’s violence). Might Um Samir have felt obliged to engage in a dialogue with Abigail in much the same way a traveler, even if carrying a passport of privilege, feels obliged to quell any suspicions from their observers? Might the traveler’s hesitant or explosive interjections feel just as weighty as Um Samir’s when she speaks back to an Israeli woman who has access to and is being consulted by an apparatus that can, and is debating, demolishing her home? Might her house’s and family’s fate be compromised were she to refuse dialogue with Abigail? What discursive negotiations is she making over whether to speak or not to speak? While these dialogues are not official interrogations, the stakes are high and are so in most peace dialogues organized in Israel and Palestine wherein “freedom of expression” is allotted differently to Israeli and Palestinian members based on their relative “immunity from retaliation” (Kuttab 85). Kuttab argues that even when a mixed group partakes in the same activity (such as a demonstration, it can be described for “the privileged [as] the right to dissent while for the oppressed group it may be a dangerous terrorist criminal activity of serious magnitude” (85). The erasures and self-censorship strategies, then, in status quo Israeli-Palestinian dialogues, make up their silences. And the silences remain because of a lack of

reflection on the factors and forces that compose the “ethical space” of these dialogues.

### **Silences in Feminist Dialogue**

The difference between the above-described forms of dialogue and women’s dialogues is that the latter often purport to be critical and anti-racist and certainly not intentionally silencing. As such, when racialized women attempt to highlight these silences (comprised of power differentials), they are asked to do so through the so-called “personal.” Lorde explains that speech on the part of the racialized woman can only occur when she is asked to “educate white women [...] as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival” (113) just as white women (or all women) are asked to “stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs” (113). Lorde explains that those who “stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older” (*Sister* 111), such women are expected to explain their oppressions. More specifically she observes with frustration that, “It is the task of women of Color to educate white women” (113). Similarly, Jad argues that in the midst of Israeli-Palestinian women’s dialogues “it was as if it was us, the Palestinians, who should lay the ground for the Israelis to understand what *they* are doing to us.”

Furthermore, in a paper given in 1980 at Amherst College called “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” Lorde iterates that “Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as *to our humanity*. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world” (“Age” 281, emphasis mine). This education, however, must be *recognizable to* (read: imitative of) its audience in order to be successful as we observe in this dissertation’s examples of dialogue (for example in speaking through the terms of singular womanhood or through white academic and theoretical genealogies). Otherwise the educator, the racialized woman in this case, is *dismissed* or re-recognized as unenlightened according to the colonial logic of a Westward linear progression of civilization. In the cases of *To Die*, the academic dialogue between Abdo and Lentin as well as Islah Jad’s witnessing of “failed” Israeli feminist activism during “Cast Lead,” there is a consistent request made of the Palestinian women to *explain themselves*: Um Samir is asked “why?”; Abdo is asked to explain her (misunderstood) approach to nationalism so that it may become recognizable; and there is a responsibility placed on Jad to *see* the activism of the Jewish activists and subscribe to it in solidarity (in other words to make herself *part of it*—an imitation of it) as her dismissal of Israeli women’s activism is read as an unfortunate oversight on her part.

Homi K. Bhabha describes these processes of becoming recognizable as human through the concept of “colonial mimicry.” Colonial mimicry responds to “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other” (“Of Mimicry” 126). However,



that Other is constrained by the colonial logic which sees the colonized person “as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry” 126, emphasis in original). Bhabha further argues that “In order to be effective mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (126). Thinking of “a reformed colonial subject” (128), Macaulay, a British government official writing about India, describes mimics as “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we [the British] govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (qtd. in Bhabha “Of Mimicry” 128). Such colonial subjects necessarily remain not-quite-white in order for the colonial project to rationalize itself. However the colonized person can enact a resemblance which can reconcile his/her “essence” (read: utter difference or *Otherness*) with their Anglicization (a term strictly distinguished from being English). Englishness is another kind of essence while the verb root in Anglicization indicates a process of transformation. However, the essence of racial Otherness haunts this process and prohibits it from ever becoming complete. It is in this context—in this understanding of the role of mimicry in colonial cultures—that we must ask: How does one begin to humanize oneself to one’s oppressor/colonizer? Perhaps one might think about highlighting *similarities* (i.e. I bleed like you bleed).<sup>105</sup> But what are the implications and

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<sup>105</sup> Fanon gestures to this humanization of the other, in its most crude and literal form, in *Black Skin, White Masks* when he explains that “After much reluctance, the scientists had conceded that the Negro was a human being; in vivo and in vitro the Negro had been proved analogous to the white man: the same morphology, the same histology” (262). He argues the less firmly convinced would state that “like

potentials of doing so in a colonial situation? How much does the racialized woman need to “hide” her difference so that she may not jeopardize her “resemblance” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry” 127) to her white other? And can this “hiding” ever produce humanization if the logic of colonial mimicry requires that the colonized never actually completely becomes “English,” white or in the case of this dissertation simply, authoritative—an equal author and dialoguer? Those positioned materially, politically and economically to grant humanization to the colonized are, whether they realize it or not, authors and participants in the dehumanization project in the first place. The person seeking humanization would engage in a dialectic and defensive battle to debunk the tropes and “sciences” made up about their identity in the first place.

Kelly Oliver argues in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* that trying to reverse dehumanization through securing recognition “reinforces the dominance of the oppressor and the subordination of the oppressed: for it is the dominant culture and its representatives who have the power to confer or withhold recognition” (26). Although it is “dehumanization [which] creates the desire and need for recognition from the dominant culture” (26), the act of recognition necessarily reiterates relations of dominance and subordination, keeping them

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us he has his heart on the left side” but “on certain points the white man remained intractable” (263). Fanon explains “two centuries ago I was lost to humanity” and at the time of this writing he explains he had attained the scientific status of human but still had traces of “thicker” or “thinner genes representing cannibalism” (263). Here the Black person is not necessarily thought of as another species but still an inferior human who requires regulation by a “civil” master.

largely intact. Similarly, in his book *Bound by Recognition*, Patchen Markell (2003) re-frames the problem of unjust social relations, arguing that those projects aiming to promote more widespread recognition or humanization of marginalized groups might indeed achieve such recognition without significantly changing the relations of injustice that underwrote the act of misrecognition in the first place. Markell offers what he calls an “alternative diagnosis of relations of social and political subordination,” one that sees such relations: “not as systematic failures by some people to recognize others’ identities, but as ways of patterning and arranging the world that allow some people and groups to enjoy a semblance of sovereign agency at others’ expense” (5). In this way non-recognition actually mis-states the problem. In *Strange Encounters*, Sara Ahmed (2000) argues that it is not that we *fail* to recognize, or misrecognize, people we categorize as “strangers,” but that we indeed recognize someone *as* a stranger. Through encounters, like the ones at checkpoints or at the Al Aqsa mosque, some Palestinians are recognized as strangers—some more than others and even the Palestinian flag at the Al Aqsa mosque is *recognized* through non-recognition. We recognize people in order to *produce* them as strangers. For Ahmed, failures of recognition do not exist; instead, we recognize someone *as* something (whether it be something “like us” or “different than us”). Jad calls attention to the pre-requisitional and performative nature of imitating her oppressor in order to participate in dialogue when she notes:

I have feminist academics coming here all the time to ask me about my feminist politics. We are occupied. Why is no one asking me about that? I have a question: if we didn't have feminism—if I weren't a feminist—would you still interview me? Would it be okay then to occupy me?

Jad points to her sense of pressure for colonial mimicry in order to be humanized—to perform a feminism that will grant her the worthiness to be liberated from military and political occupation. Many interviewees, in fact, expressed a kind of annoyance that I was asking questions about feminist issues, some reminding me that their homes were being demolished in a few days. It became clear in conversations that their annoyance did not stem from a non-subscription to the importance of feminist work but from the narrow points of entry for dialogue through which Palestinian women were always being asked to speak and the sense that it was a kind of prerequisite to gaining outsiders' compassion and solidarity, if not to gaining their very humanity or humanness.

Within this dynamic the humanization project would commence through the figure of the already guilty racialized woman (the already terrorist or archaic and unenlightened woman). *The humanization project, then, is part and parcel of the dehumanization project.* Lorde importantly calls this request by white feminists in the American feminist movement an intentional “diversion of energies” from resistance work and therefore a primary tool of oppressors (Lorde, *Sister* 113): “The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant *drain of energy* which might be better used for redefining ourselves” (*Sister* 115). The PACBI movement also mentions this

critical view of the functions of Israeli-Palestinian dialogues arguing that women's NGOs and Western feminists have been "attracting active women in the national movement" and asking them to focus instead "on criticizing 'nationalism and masculine chauvinism'" through "personal" dialogues. The PACBI brochure gestures to the depoliticization of Palestinian women in these "humanization" dialogues. Lorde argues this request is an "old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns" (*Sister* 113). In resistance, Lorde famously argues that "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (*Sister* 112, emphasis in original) and contends that this request for humanization would be a "ceaseless" effort. Silences would remain. Another dialogue is required.

Similarly, according to Abdelnour and Kuttab, the very presence of these status quo dialogues works to ensure that silences continue to exist: the peace industry, in tandem with the aid industry (Abdelnour), work to "normalize" the occupation. For Kuttab "a problem arises when the event becomes more important than its content—when dialogue becomes an end in and of itself" publicized widely for media (Kuttab 87). Ultimately, discourses of "'aid,' 'development' and 'reconstruction'" and I would add, of ongoing dialogue, "shield Israel's ongoing occupation and colonial project" (emphasis in original). As a "full third of the Palestinian Authority budget is aid-subsidized" to support "a distorted Palestinian political system" the aid and peace industry, Abdelnour argues, "directly removes from Israel the burden of responsibility for the destruction of Palestinian lives,

livelihoods and infrastructure.” Israel then paradoxically refocuses “its resources and efforts on the acceleration of Palestinian poverty, the expansion of settlements, the expropriation of Jerusalem and the destruction of Gaza” (Abdelnour).<sup>106</sup>

While Palestinian women’s boycotts of dialogue have been accused of being anti-peace, I have shown in this chapter how silence can be re-understood as inherent in the current status quo peace dialogues between Israelis and Palestinians. The dialogues that do exist have thus far repeatedly failed to adequately address the colonial aspects of the conflict. Core issues to do with the injustices of the occupation are avoided (Kuttab, Svirsky), the dialogues tend to dehistoricize and decontextualize Palestinian stories (Abdo, “Palestinian Munadelat” 173), and the fundamental foundation of the dialogue as one between a colonizer (or occupier) and a colonized (or occupied) is ignored. So what kinds of dialogues exist today in the face of these silences? Now that I have delineated the silence-making demands of colonial mimicry in Israeli-Palestinian exchanges in general, I explore Palestinian women’s re-articulation of these power relations as they step outside the East-West mimicry dialectic and face a different audience.

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<sup>106</sup> More skeptically some have pointed to the ways in which the peace and aid movements are parts of an industry that produces thousands of jobs (Narwani). Lavie points out that that in 2002 the “peace’n’dialogue industry rolled in about 9 million dollars of US and EU tax deductible donations” (217).

### **Discursive Resistance: The Paradox of Breaking the Silence by Boycotting Dialogue**

Power relations in the ethical space, it is important to note, are not simply imposed on the Palestinian woman. Palestinian women cannot “resist” power relations from a space that is “outside” of power. Indeed, “the principal feature of mythic discourse is that it conceals its own origins as well as those of what it describes” (Said 321). In order to re-articulate the coordinates of “force relations” in power, one must be part of power: “one does not really make discourse at will, or statements in it, without first belonging—in some cases unconsciously, but at any rate involuntarily—to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence” (Said 321). For example, while the international women’s movement of the late nineteenth century historically regarded Palestinian women as students of “advanced” cultures, that did not mean that Palestinians were “outside” of power, but rather, constituents of it. As such, many Palestinian women internalized Orientalist narratives that enlightenment was to be gained from Western and Jewish women with the aim of improving their worrisome situations as they were being passed from one set of colonial hands, the Ottoman Empire, to another, the British (Weber). The successful interpellation or consent of a Palestinian woman (in the most unconscious ways one is interpellated into subjectivity) makes it difficult to refuse the Israeli or international summon for dialogue. Therefore, after many years of engaging the East-West dialectic it is

important to pay attention to Palestinian women's initiatives to re-articulate the "force relations" in power.

On a more superficial level, Palestinians are giving up rewards that come with dialoguing such as expensive trips, "fancy hotels and [...] a lot of money" (Barghouti qtd. in Mustafa) or risk being extricated from dialogues altogether if they do not continue to engage Israeli women. This is especially true as Palestinian women are accused of anti-feminism and framed as "guilty" or radical (read: terrorist) for refusing to participate. Because the stakes of refusing dialogue with Israelis are so high for Palestinians, when they actually refuse to dialogue with Israelis, Israelis and others in Europe and North America take notice (and perhaps some power relations are shaken). The work of defamiliarizing the dialectic within which Palestinian and Israeli women are caught to reveal how it is supported by a discursive and material environment of colonial violence paves the way for Palestinian women to reformulate the set of "force relations" in power. The effects of new and different conversations have not revealed themselves clearly as of yet; however, the BDS and PACBI movements have been slowly growing in support within Palestine even while international resistance to them has intensified.

Israeli feminists' distress about the lack of Palestinian women's participation in Israeli left wing and feminist organizations is evident particularly in WIB. Svirsky (the former director of WIB) said she wondered, often, why



Palestinian women were no longer getting involved in joint feminist initiatives, especially the Jerusalem protests every Friday. She noted that only one Palestinian woman, of whom she spoke fondly, was currently working at *B'TSelem*. She also reminisced nostalgically about a time when the Jerusalem protests were attended almost equally by Israeli and Palestinian women. My presence in her home made her feel, she admitted, a certain sense of pleasant surprise.

Perhaps the Israeli left and more specifically, Israeli feminist groups, *need* the Palestinian woman's corporeal presence (and not necessarily her agreement or affirmation) in order to define themselves as anti-occupation feminist groups<sup>107</sup> (and according to some Palestinian women, to “prove,” against all criticisms, the democratic nature of Israel). The inclusion of the Palestinian woman—even when it is only her attendance—in Israeli feminist organizations and events certainly, at the very least, attributes credibility to the organizations. Moreover, her presence can work to affirm the organization's mandate as a “transnational” movement with the capability of peace-building because it figures as an exception to “intercultural hatred.” This figuration hides the ways in which feminist dialogue can operate as a more subtle version of high-level political peace talks, because it

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<sup>107</sup> Such dialectic reflection and identification has been shown in Hegelian master-slave theories.

avoids overt bullying, interrogation and erasure supported by stark disparities in power and leverage.<sup>108</sup>

The breakdown of women's dialogue groups as well as the lack of Palestinian women's involvement in Israeli feminist movements (and therefore the fall off of Israeli-Palestinian women's organizations) is injurious to Israel's government whose contemporary Public Relations and Branding campaigns herald women's rights as unique to Israel in the Middle East. The existence of Israeli-Palestinian women's groups, and their inclusion of the purportedly *really* oppressed group, Palestinian women confirms Israel's desired image as a paternalistic but *just* overseer of both populations (the overseeing "father" and the simultaneously necessary enforcer).<sup>109</sup> Problematically, as Jasbir Puar argues, Israel has "instrumentalized" feminist and queer movements to "prove" it is a non-oppressive state. Colonial powers have historically used litmus tests such as "how well do you treat your women?" and more recently "how well do you treat your queers?" as independent questions from other oppressive policies (as though they are not related). When Palestinian women were participating in Israeli feminist organizations, the credibility of Israel, then, as a non-oppressive state

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<sup>108</sup> The "Palestine Papers," recently revealed, clearly show this dynamic in high-political talks.

<sup>109</sup> "Be the Father and the oppressor; just and unjust" is a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently re-inscribes both colonizer and colonized (Bhabha "Sly Civility" 74). This colonial dictum reveals "an agonistic uncertainty contained in the incompatibility of empire and nation; it puts under erasure, not 'on trial,' the very discourse of civility within which representative government claims its liberty and empire its ethics" (Bhabha, "Sly Civility" 74).

was more difficult to question. Indeed many of Israel's past prime ministers, when accused of being oppressive, retort with reference to the fact that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, citing as the hallmarks of such democracy the annual gay pride parade in Jerusalem and the liberation of women. The freedom of Israeli women was ambiguously differentiated from women's status in other Middle East countries who, like those in Israel, have high enrollment rates in postsecondary education, are involved in politics and have the vote while simultaneously battling domestic abuse issues, religious fundamentalism, rights to divorce and custody of children as well as equitable workplace conditions.<sup>110</sup> The (non)presence of Palestinian women in Israeli feminist organizations then has massive effects for Israel's branding campaign and reveals the power of Palestinian women's bodies and presence (or absence in this case) for Israeli self-definition.

The distress Israeli women exhibit when Palestinian women withdraw from Israeli feminist organizations confirms the important place Palestinian women occupy in the discursive environment of teacher and student. How can a teacher exist if there is no student? How does the willful absence of the student discredit *the value* of the teacher? Palestinian women are beginning to re-define

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<sup>110</sup> Israeli women face many of the same (and some different) gender issues as Arab women, particularly as they live in a highly militarized society (see Hazleton). Palestinian women comprise more than 50% of postsecondary students in the West Bank and have high employment rates (slightly higher than men because of female-seeking foreign NGOs). For a long time Israeli women were traveling to Cyprus to attain divorce documents. Similar to Palestinian women, they are pressured to reproduce for the benefits of national enterprise.

their place in such dialectics, troubling the master's "tools" or language. Their place, the place of marginalized voices, remains important in the schematic of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. *Indeed an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue can only be named as such if there is at least one Palestinian woman present.* Moreover, without these dialogues' existence there can be no moderate Arabs to which the Israeli public can point and juxtapose the "other" non-dialogue-able Arab (the one who is "too radical"). If there are no Palestinians to dialogue with no mediators between the colonizer and the colonized, no colonial mimic, it would be *too racist* to write them off as all non-dialogue-able; another narrative would be required. But what?

While, according to Foucault, "great radical ruptures" and "massive binary divisions" in the form of resistance are possible "occasionally" (96), "one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings" (96).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> An example occurred when Judith Butler called up Alan Dershowitz asking why she was not included on the "black list" of academics who are critical of Israeli state policies (Butler "The Cultural"). Asking to be included on such a list rearticulates a power relation which distributes hegemonic power between the two poles (previously comprising the vilified anti-Semite or self-hating Jew who was "outed" on the list and those who were simply *not*). Another example occurs when IDF/IOF soldiers threaten Palestinian women prisoners with rape, and the Palestinian woman preemptively asks the IDF/IOF soldier to rape her during her torture (Abdo "Palestinian Munadelat" 185). Abdo recounts a case when the IDF/IOF soldier leaves in bewilderment at this provocation (perhaps having lost some of his discursive power). Abdo outlines such power plays with discourse (while still remembering the structural and systemic domination of Palestinian women) to reveal Palestinian women's re-articulations of discursive power or resistance through language ("Palestinian Munadelat" 185).

These “transitory points of resistance” reformulate the coordinates of power, for “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95).

Palestinian women are re-asserting their place in the margin as a “site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (hooks 341) which is, according to bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, a central location for the production of a “counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives” (341). When Palestinian women refuse to participate and give credibility to Israeli “anti-occupation” feminist organizations that rely on Palestinian inclusion for definition, they destabilize Israel’s definition as a feminist haven (often used to absolve Israel of oppressive policies). This silence is not simply a kind of revenge (an attempt to hold their breath until they get their way), for that plea would continue to live in the old dialectic relationship. Instead, they are articulating a new language in which anti-colonial feminism can address both domestic violence and systemic state violence.<sup>112</sup> While there is always a risk that Palestinian women’s boycotts of dialogue may be narrated as “proof”

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<sup>112</sup> Andrea Smith also calls for these reformulations in dialogue by calling attention to the relationship between colonial violence and feminist movements (with a particular focus on Indigenous women in North America). She argues that in the case of indigenous women in Canada seeking liberation from patriarchal violence while struggling against colonialism there needs to be a formulation of anticolonial responses to gender violence and a radical rethinking of liberation. Smith argues that women of colour are raped because of *their gender and race* and feminist work needs to adopt antiviolence strategies that are mindful of the larger structures of violence (i.e. state violence, prisons, militarism, colonialism and economic exploitation) that shape the world in which violence against women operates. White feminism (as an institution) often operates through liberal understandings of feminist activism that both silence and are silent on the complexity of differences *between* women and the ways in which colonial and systemic state violence informs domestic violence.

that they are not quite educated and civilized, further perpetuating Orientalist ideologies and intensifying violence against Palestinians, the *new* anti-colonial dialogues Palestinian women have inspired (through the theorizations of the Women's Brochure, for example) are proliferating more every day as I go on to show below.

### **Boycott Inspired Dialogues**

Reframing the boycott of conventional Israeli-Palestinian peace dialogues, not as an anti-peace silence or rejection, but as opening the potential for the proliferation of dialogue, invites us to understand the boycott on different terms. Palestinian women are not boycotting all dialogues. They are taking control of the conditions of dialogues with Israeli and international feminists, and consequently some anti-colonial feminist dialogues have emerged. These dialogues are centered on “strict” anti-war feminist principles (Shamas), with respect to various historical narratives and an attention to the systemic oppression which shapes the discursive environment. Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) in Ramallah, for example, explains that during the Gaza crisis anyone who refused to stand up against Israel's assault against Gaza could not be part of her multi-ethnic feminist dialogue group. She continues to participate in an international women's initiative but sets the terms for inclusion in that dialogue in conscious relation to the discursive parameters

that have stymied Palestinian participation in the past. She explains that women who remain silent toward “the attacks on Gaza” can no longer be a part of the feminist dialogue group that remains today. Standing up against oppression—with no exceptions—constitutes the kind of dialogue Palestinian women seek through their boycott of status quo dialogues as well as the strict criteria for future dialogues.

Interestingly, it has become apparent that Palestinian women’s dialogue boycotts have created more dialogue. In an article entitled “Time to Boycott Israel,” Naomi Klein tackles major rebuttals against the boycott. She responds to popular challenges against the boycott that argue “boycotts sever communication” and that “we need more dialogue, not less.” Klein responds to this challenge with a personal story:

For eight years, my books have been published in Israel by a commercial house called Babel. But when I published *The Shock Doctrine*, I wanted to respect the boycott. So I contacted a small publisher called Andalus, an activist press involved in the anti-occupation movement. We drafted a contract that guarantees that all proceeds go to Andalus’s work, and none to me. In other words, I am boycotting the Israeli economy but not Israelis.<sup>113</sup> Coming up with our modest publishing plan required dozens of phone calls, e-mails and instant messages, stretching from Tel Aviv, to Ramallah, to Paris, to Toronto, to Gaza City. My point is this: as soon as you start implementing a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions strategy, *dialogue increases dramatically. Building a movement requires endless communicating*, as many in the anti-apartheid struggle well recall. (45, my emphasis)

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<sup>113</sup> Of course there is a fine line between boycotting a business and boycotting citizens (as citizens work in businesses).

While Klein focuses here on economic boycott, one can see that it is also a dialogue boycott (argued by some to be unfairly obstructing communication with individual Israelis and depriving common Israelis of access to Klein's text). It has more simply been accused of being anti-dialogue and anti-peace. However, Klein's participation in the boycott has spurred on a growing number of important and new dialogues, just as the lack of Palestinian corporeal presence in Israeli feminist organizations has spurred new conversations amongst some Israeli feminists.

Another example of a new dialogue is an interview aired by DemocracyNOW.org called "Three Women, Palestinian Christian, Muslim and Israeli Jew on Life under Occupation" in July of 2005, wherein three women from the region describe their lives. In the interview with the three women, Amy Goodman asks Michal Sagi (the Israeli woman from *Machsom/Checkpoint Watch*) how she feels about the boycott of Israel. Sagi responds:

We Israelis, and I am Israeli, [...] care deeply for Israel and its future [...]. It's going to be very hard for Israel if countries and companies will start boycotting us. But I think that we need a certain amount of pressure to go forward. We need a third party to get involved [...] in a fair way that [acknowledges] the rights of Palestinians. ("Three Women" 10)

While Sagi does not point specifically to a dialogue boycott, the forms of dialogue she is partaking in, both in her activist work in Israel and in her interview, are important. She faces the media, not the Palestinian woman next to her, for example. Conventionally Western media (or conferences and NGOs) ask a Palestinian and an Israeli to dialogue with each other while the audience



voyeuristically watches them bridge their purported “hatred.”<sup>114</sup> Jad compares meeting Israeli women in Europe to performing in “a fashionable zoo” wherein she “felt” like Europeans brought “two different monkeys from two different species” to “debate in front of [them].” The *DemocracyNOW* dialogue, wherein Israeli-Jewish and the two Palestinian women (one Christian and one Muslim) speak about systemic racism, colonial occupation, oppression and injustice in their region, while *facing an outward audience*, is quite different. They are not facing each other for the purported purposes of social humanization or “overcoming psychological barriers.” In this dialogue Palestinian stories that assert that Jewish people and Palestinians are not inherent enemies and that the conflict is not an issue of intercultural hatred but rather of colonial and systemic oppression are manifested in practice. Ultimately, the accusations that Palestinian women’s boycotts of dialogue are anti-cooperation, anti-dialogue and anti-peace are not as solid as they might first appear as we have seen various new

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<sup>114</sup> Said notes European histories of Semite-watching when he reproduces a passage from Proust in which “the sudden appearance of a Jew into an aristocratic salon is described as follows: ‘The Rumanians, the Egyptians, the Turks may hate the Jews. But in a French drawing-room the differences between those people are not so apparent, and an Israelite making his entry as though he were emerging from the heart of the desert, his body crouching like a hyaenas’ [sic], his neck thrust obliquely forward, spreading himself in proud “salaams,” completely satisfies a certain taste for the oriental [un gout pour l’orientalisme]’ ” (293). Perhaps Western obsessions with watching Israelis and Palestinians dialogue or argue operates as a remnant of a voyeuristic colonial pastime, particularly considering the intimate role Western countries played in creating the occupation of Palestine and in the general colonial (and arbitrary) partitioning of the Middle East. Such an idea might be the content of another dissertation.

coordinates of power relations take shape as a result, and new dialogues flourish.

The future of these new dialogues, admittedly, remains to be seen.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> During my last visit in winter 2009 Shamas was beginning to articulate the emergence of anti-colonial dialogues to me (particularly because the dynamics of “Cast Lead”/Gaza were freshly painful). It became impossible for me to get updates on new anti-colonial dialogues over email or the phone because of the private nature of these topics. It would require at least another trip to follow up on the new dialogues, something I wish to do in the future.

## Conclusion

My surprising experiences with Gila Svirsky along with the request for my resignation from a Palestinian group in Canada created the research question upon which this dissertation is built: why, despite the ubiquitous dialogues of the first *intifada* and the various external pressures to dialogue, have Israeli and Palestinian women stopped dialoguing?<sup>116</sup> Throughout this dissertation I have outlined, using Palestinian women's interviews as a foundational and grounding basis, the problematic "top down" or Orientalist dynamics of various forms of

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<sup>116</sup> After conducting research and reflecting on the boycott criteria, I wonder about whether or not I violated the boycott. On the one hand, Svirsky has anti-oppression beliefs, as an individual that stand up to the criteria of the PACBI/BDS chart and my interview with her, which helped me understand the dynamics of Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogues from a critical Israeli perspective, contributed to the research of this project which is ultimately working to critique the occupation and promote an anti-colonial politics. On the other hand, Svirsky has had to (maybe necessarily) water-down her politics to gain the support of other Israelis during times of "exception" and this practice might be considered "ineffective." Moreover, it is crucial to consider that our dialogue was one between a researcher and an interviewee which invites the question: what is a researcher's role in the boycott movement? How can a researcher find out more about the occupation—even if for the purposes of critiquing it—if we/they cannot access interview subjects? Interviews are certainly not the same as "peace dialogue." Interviews are acts of obtaining information while peace dialogues envision a reciprocal exchange of ideas in order to come to an agreement. Perhaps it was my blog entry about Svirsky which celebrated her anti-occupation paraphernalia (strewn about her house) and the images of her children wearing kuffiyehs which bothered Palestinian readers. And perhaps, I blurred the lines between interviewee and dialoguer when I stayed at Svirsky's house for two days (in order to access West Jerusalem which is only occupied by Jewish Israelis) and consequently dialogued with her about the everyday politics of the region. Indeed, Svirsky took me on a tour of the wall from the Israeli's perspective and this was an important perspective to have for future research. This reflection is an example of the ways in which the boycott politics can not only be quite complex (when one applies and considers the PACBI chart), but also how boycott politics can actually spur on *more* dialogue.

Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogues (i.e. academic, popular, political, activist and otherwise).<sup>117</sup> I have further explored the ways in which these problematic dynamics, when left uninterrupted, have had broader ramifications such as the reproduction of the occupation. As long as peace dialogues continue to occur there is a sense that “something is happening”—something towards peace. However, as we have seen, the usual processes of the occupation continue to operate under this semblance.<sup>118</sup> Decades of this dialogue work have not stopped the production of stronger borders between the women and more stifling circumstances for Palestinian women.

I have extended my initial argument and research question to ask whether the Palestinian women's boycott of dialogue might be effective. Using Lorde's important insights on dialogue (and her move away from dialogues that require minority women to “humanize” themselves) I argue that Palestinian women's boycotts of dialogue are actually communicative gestures *towards more (but reconstituted) dialogue*. In a world where the boycott movement seems to be growing, there have been some objections in feminist, academic and left circles, arguing that non-communication is antithetical to democracy, fairness and peace.

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<sup>117</sup> The common phrase “unequal power relations” used by various theorists when talking about Israeli-Palestinian dialogues has been unpacked in order to answer the call for more contextualized understandings of women's lives.

<sup>118</sup> Selby argues that at worst, “‘peace processes’ are a means by which states can re-brand themselves in the hope of improving their position and competitive edge within the global political economy” (22) [...] “without requiring them to make any progress on core issues” (22). For example, during the Oslo years (when Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogues were frequent) settlement expansion doubled in Palestinian territories.

I hope that this dissertation plays a corrective role in equations of boycotts with silence. By revealing the silences that exist in status-quo dialogues, dialogue boycotts become understood as movements for *more* dialogue (i.e. ones that include more voices and more narratives and engage discussions of inequities, occupation and colonialism).

This dissertation also hopes to contribute to the “struggle” or the “‘painstaking labour’ of getting closer” (Ahmed, *Strange 180*) while we retain our differences. I am also still interested in the concept of “a new singularization” of feminism (Friedman, *Mappings 4*) of feminism insofar as the feminist work that emerges from it operates in anti-colonial forms and with respect to issues of systemic oppression. There is no question that Palestinian women are interested in feminist work. Moreover, the motivation for a cooperation of feminist movements has also been clear in Palestinian women’s work, as they worked closely with Jewish, European, Egyptian and Iranian women in the early twentieth century towards rights for women (around issues of education, veiling, suffrage, and citizenship etc.) (Weber, *Making*). However, the struggle continues today for Arab women who are challenged to navigate the dangers of Western interests and patriarchal-nationalist movements. Thus far, the Israeli-Palestinian dialogues remain within the realm of these dialectics and have not produced a more complicated feminist dialogue based on connecting misogynist masculine violence with colonial violence, including the violences which create class

disparities “internally” in both Israel and Palestine.<sup>119</sup> Palestinian women are stepping out of the East-West dialectic of the status-quo dialogues in search of another configuration for dialogue, a search that extends from the late nineteenth century and will continue for years to come.

The effectiveness of new “outward” facing dialogues in generating necessary pressure on Israel to comply with international law is still to be seen. Moreover, the effects that these new dialogues will have on the feminist movements of Israel and Palestine are yet to be assessed. Perhaps a detailed study of the ways Israeli feminist movements are changing (whether to be more conservative or otherwise) is needed particularly in relation to its internal class and race divisions. Furthermore, there is an equal need to study the new articulations of Palestinian feminisms as they continue to work diligently on feminist issues (around honour killings, domestic violence, incest, sexual assault, and child-marriage) and connect these violences with race, class and colonial violences. The move toward anti-colonial feminisms in Palestine is an ongoing

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<sup>119</sup> Lavie argues that the dominance of Ashkenazi women in Israeli and Palestinian women’s groups hinders the proliferation of the boycott and BDS movement while Sephardim, Mizrahim and Palestinian Israelis vote in favour of the boycott. However, these pro-boycott groups continuously struggle against the Ashkenazi upper classes’ preoccupation with the Palestinian national movement and its self-imposed alienation from “the intra-Jewish Israeli struggle for social justice” (219). Moreover Ashkenazi women have more resources because of their upper class status. Lavie argues that the ability to “de-Ashkenazify as a community” would mean to “sever ties with the US-Euro-centred hegemon so that a one-state solution becomes viable” (218). However, it is important to note that some Sephardic and Mizrahim Jews have also adopted Orientalist dynamics in feminist dialogues (as we see in *To Die*).

phenomenon that rejects the prerequisites of colonial mimicry and warrants further study. It is my wish that the preceding reflections offer some fertile soil upon which to continue this work. Perhaps, in the meanwhile, supporting the Palestinian women's boycott of Orientalist dialogues is defensible and necessary, even if only for the promotion of *more* dialogue.

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## Appendix A: "Women's Brochure" from PACBI Website

### العلاقة مع النساء الاسرائيليات بين التطبيع و"صناعة السلام"

احتلت العلاقة مع الاسرائيليين منذ الستينات حيزا هاما في تفكير العديد من المنظمات السياسية الفلسطينية المنضوية تحت لواء منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية، خاصة تلك المتبنية الفكر الماركسي منها. كانت تلك المنظمات تميز بين اليهودية كديانة والصهيونية، كأيدولوجية عنصرية موجهة لسياسة دولة اسرائيل. لذا دعت لمقاومة الصهيونية كونها السبب الرئيس للصراع في نفس الوقت الذي دعت فيه لدعم العلاقة مع اليهود المعادين للصهيونية. على اثر ذلك، دفعت بعض المنظمات الفلسطينية بتكوين مجموعات فلسطينية-إسرائيلية لمقاومة الصهيونية وسياساتها وداعية لانشاء دولة ديمقراطية علمانية واحدة يعيش فيها اليهود جنبا الى جنب مع الفلسطينيين، دون تمييز أو تفرقة.

تزايدت في الانتفاضة الاولى الدعوات للقاء الاسرائيليين والتي كانت وراءها أطراف سياسية فلسطينية تهدف إلى "تعريف" الجانب الإسرائيلي بالواقع الفلسطيني المعاش والبحث عن دعم للانتفاضة ومطالبها في الأوساط الإسرائيلية. برز في تلك الأونة العديد من الافراد المستقلين الذين تلقوا دعماً وتشجيعاً كبيرين من الدول الغربية بهدف جلب فلسطينيين واسرائيليين سوياً الى جلسات "حوار" و "تعارف" و أيضا "لكسر الحواجز النفسية" بين الطرفين. تزامنت هذه الدعوات مع تزايد الإدانة العالمية لسياسة القمع الإسرائيلية بحق المدنيين الفلسطينيين العزل ومع تعالي النقد لسياسة "القبضة الحديدية وتكسير العظام" التي جوبهت بها الانتفاضة الفلسطينية. كان انتشار المؤسسات الفلسطينية الاسرائيلية المشتركة وتزايد عدد الافراد المنغمسين في نشاطاتها مؤشرا هاما لتغيير اسس العلاقة السابقة والتي كانت تمنع التعامل مع أية مؤسسة او افراد يتبنون الايدولوجية الصهيونية.

على هامش الانتفاضة الاولى أيضاً، برز العديد من الدعوات -- المدفوعة بتشجيع أوروبي واضح -- بتنظيم مؤتمرات ولقاءات دولية بين فلسطينيات وإسرائيليات "لكسر الحواجز النفسية" و "التعرف على الآخر" وتخطي "الهويات القومية الذكورية" وإيجاد "القواسم النسوية المشتركة" بين كلا الطرفين. كانت هذه اللقاءات تركز بالعادة على الواقع الأنّي أو المستقبل وتتجنب تماماً التطرق للماضي "وتبعاته". وكانت تركز على جلب النشيطات النسويات في الحركة الوطنية والمثقفات والأكاديميات من الطرفين للجلوس معا. كان الكثير من تلك اللقاءات يركز على نقد "القومية الشوفينية والذكورية" وإيجاد قواسم مشتركة للعمل بين النساء بعد تخطيهم الوعي لما يفصل بينهم من "حدود قومية" تدعم "سلطة الرجال" في كلا الطرفين "ضد النساء" في كلا الطرفين.

بعد أكثر من عقدين ونيف من العلاقات بين اسرائيليات وفلسطينيات الا يستحق الامر لجلسة أو جلسات تقييم Joint لمعرفة ماذا كُتب او خسر كل طرف من الاطراف المنغمسة في تلك اللقاءات والمشاريع المشتركة . يمكننا في البدء سوق أهم الفرضيات الخاطئة التي تقوم عليها تلك اللقاءات والمشاريع Ventures المشتركة:

- 1 - أن النساء هن أول من يكتوين بنار الحروب وويلاتها. فالإسرائيلية تفقد أبناءها للحرب، والفلسطينية اضافة لفقدان ابنائها فان مقومات حياتها تدمر من "العنف الذكوري" في كلا الطرفين.

- 2 - أن "نبش التاريخ" --خاصة تاريخ الحركة الصهيونية-- لن يجدي نفعاً، والأجدي التركيز على الحاضر لمنع سقوط المزيد من الضحايا ولوقف آلام التكل عند الطرفين.
- 3 - أن اتاحة الفرصة للنساء للدخول لحلبة المفاوضات والسياسة سيساعد أكثر، من وجود الرجال فيها، في الوصول الى حلول أكثر انسانية وعملية نظراً "الميل النساء الطبيعي للسلام والنفور من العنف".
- 4 - أن القومية Nationalism سواء اليهودية أو الفلسطينية قامتا على اضطهاد النساء واستغلال وتهميش دورهن في المجتمع في سبيل اعلاء سيطرة وذكورية الرجال. هذا "الاضطهاد المشترك" يشكل أرضية التقاء للنساء من الطرفين.
- 5 - أن النساء كل النساء- واحد في كلا الطرفين، همومهن واحدة وأسباب اضطهادهن واحدة.
- 6 - أن تلك اللقاءات، والتي غالباً ما تغطي اعلامياً بشكل مكثف، تشير الى أن "النساء يعملن معاً" وانه من المفضل (غريباً) تشجيع كلا الطرفين للعمل سوياً بدلاً من الإدانة والتهمج على سياسة اسرائيل والذئ "لن يجدي نفعاً".
- 7 - أن على الطرف الغربي "المحايد" ان يساعد الطرفين على "كسر الحواجز النفسية" و"التعرف على الآخر والشعور معه" بدلاً من التوقع كل في موقعه.
- 8 - أن الطرف الفلسطيني قاطع الكثير من اللقاءات مع إسرائيليين ولم يفيد ذلك، لذا فالأفضل المشاركة لعرض وجهة نظرنا والدفاع عنها.

المغالطات السابقة لا تقوم على أسس يدعمها الواقع أو التاريخ، ليس في فلسطين فحسب ولكن في العديد من دول العالم التي خضعت للاستعمار، وذلك للأسباب التالية:

- 1 - ان الكثير من تجارب النساء في دول العالم الثالث التي عانت من الاستعمار أثبتت ان الحركات الوطنية، والتي كان يقودها الرجال، هي أول من دفع النساء للسياسة والعمل في المجال العام في مناهضة ومقاومة الاستعمار.
- 2 - أنه في سبيل تقوية دور النساء في الحركات الوطنية دعم الرجال وشجع التعليم والخروج لسوق العمل لكثير من النساء (دعوات قاسم أمين وسعد زغلول في مصر والحاج أمين الحسيني، عز الدين القسام وأكرم زعيتر في فلسطين) وبالتالي لم تكن تلك الحركات فقط مستغلة وقامعة للنساء ولكن كانت محررة ودافعة للكثير منهن.
- 3 - أنه يجب التفرقة بين حركة قومية استعمارية واخرى تخضع للاستعمار، فصحيح ان في كلا الحركتين ذكور ولكن هناك فارق بين طرف معتدي وطرف معتدى عليه. والمعتدي لا يفرق في تلك الحالة بين نساء ورجال ولا حتى اطفال.
- 4 - أن النساء، مثل الرجال، لسن كتلة متمازجة في كافة الاقطار يعانين من نفس المشاكل ويحملن بنفس الآمال، بل إن النساء يتوزعن ويتفرقن حسب انتماءاتهن القومية، العرقية، والطبقية، لذا يوجد فرق قومي بين اسرائيلية (محتلة) وفلسطينية (خاضعة للاستعمار)، كما يوجد فرق طبقي بين فلسطينية مدينية من طبقة ميسورة وبين أخرى لاجئة وفقيرة.
- 5 - أنه بالرغم من ذكورية بعض الحركات الوطنية الا أن اضطهادهن للنساء لا يرقى ولا يقارن بمستوى الاضطهاد القومي والذي ينزل الدمار على الجميع، رغم تبجحه في الكثير من الاحيان بالعمل على "تحرير النساء". ولنا في فلسطين مثال قديم والعراق مثال حديث.
- 6 - أن النفور من التطرق للماضي، في الحالة الفلسطينية تحديداً، له علاقة بالتهرب من بحث آثار وتبعات ذلك الماضي والتي مازالت حاضرة أي قضية اللاجئين وقرار حق العودة والتعويض لهم طبقاً لقرار الأمم المتحدة رقم 194.
- 7 - أن العرب واليهود، قبل انتشار الحركة الصهيونية وتأسيس دولة اسرائيل، لم يعانوا من أية حواجز نفسية أو عرقية تذكر، ولكن ما خلق الحواجز هي السياسة الاستعمارية الاقتلاعية الصهيونية والتي لم تتغير حتى اليوم.

في الأخير، وحتى لا يستمر خلط الحابل بالنابل ويضيع عمل البعض من النساء اللواتي يردن الدخول في غمار اشكال جديدة من النضال لتحرير وطنهن مع عمل البعض الذي "يستنفع" ويستفيد ماليا وسياسيا ومعنويا من تلك اللقاءات يجب التوقف لوضع معايير تضبط العلاقة بين الطرفين. يجب أن تركز هذه المعايير على أرضية مقاومة الاحتلال وسياسات دولة اسرائيل العنصرية في قمع واضطهاد الشعب الفلسطيني في كافة مناطق تواجده. في التالي بعض الاسئلة التي يجب معرفة جوابها قبل الدخول في لقاء أو مشروع مع طرف خارجي أو اسرائيلي:

